













THE LIFE, WORK  
AND EVIL FATE OF  
GUY DE MAUPASSANT



THE WORKS OF  
GUY DE MAUPASSANT  
NEWLY TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH  
BY MARJORIE LAURIE

---

*I*  
*BEL AMI*

*II*  
*A LIFE*

*III*  
*BOULE DE SUIF*

*IV*  
*THE HOUSE OF MADAME  
TELLIER*

*V*  
*THE MASTER PASSION*

*VI*  
*NOTRE CŒUR*

*VII*  
*MONT-ORIOLE*

*VIII*  
*YVETTE AND OTHER STORIES*

---

T. WERNER LAURIE, LTD., LONDON





GUY DE MAUPASSANT.

THE LIFE,  
WORK AND EVIL FATE  
OF  
GUY DE MAUPASSANT  
*(Gentilhomme de Lettres)*

BY  
ROBERT HARBOROUGH SHERARD

*"Phumble verité."*

LONDON  
T. WERNER LAURIE LTD.  
30 NEW BRIDGE STREET, E.C.4  
1922

TO

H.E.

Monsieur A. DE MONZIE  
(whilom Minister of Fine Arts)

*“ au signe de Maupassant ”*

this Book is, without his permission,  
but in gratitude for encouragement  
and kind words at Miromesnil  
DEDICATED

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

*The half-tone illustrations are by Mr Emery Walker.*

Portrait of Guy de Maupassant . . . . .	Frontispiece
Swan Inn at Tôtes, where the Supper-Party in " <i>Boule-de-Suif</i> " took place . . . . .	8
Portrait of Madame Feutry, née Dunet, of Tourville-sur- Arques, who remembers the birth of Maupassant in 1850 (Photo by M. Langlet) . . . . .	18
No. 44, rue des Charrettes, Rouen, where Adrienne Legay committed suicide . . . . .	18
Facsimile of Guy de Maupassant's Official Birth-Certificate . . . . .	26
Château de Miromesnil at the time of Guy's Birth there in 1850 (By Courtesy of M. Henri Defontaine) . . . . .	38
Views of Château de Miromesnil, as it is to-day (Photo by E. Pireaux) . . . . .	38
Maupassant Memorial in the Park of the Château . . . . .	42
View of Tourville-sur-Arques (Photos by E. Pireaux) . . . . .	42
Portrait of Laure de Maupassant, Guy's Mother, with little Simone, Guy's niece and heiress . . . . .	50
Family Group of Maupassant Family, giving portraits of Guy, his grandfather, of his uncle Cord'homme (the Cornudet of " <i>Boule-de-Suif</i> ") and of his mother. (Note.—Guy stands second to the left in the last row. Jules de Maupassant is the gentleman seated with hat on. Cord'homme (Cornudet) is 9th from left in last row, with straw hat. Madame de Maupassant is the lady seated on the extreme right, on chair.) (By Courtesy of M. Henri Defontaine) . . . . .	54
Postcard to Henri Cécard signed "de Mt." . . . . .	56
Gustave de Maupassant, Guy's Father (By Courtesy of M. Henri Defontaine) . . . . .	58
Private Chapel in Miromesnil Park, where Guy was Baptized (Photo by E. Pireaux) . . . . .	62
Church at Tourville-sur-Arques, where Guy was Christened (Photo by E. Pireaux) . . . . .	62
Maupassant's Statue in Rouen . . . . .	78
Font at Tourville Church, where Guy was Christened. During the Terror it was used as a Dog-kennel (Photo by M. Langlet) . . . . .	78
Maupassant's Statue in Paris . . . . .	78
Guy de Maupassant as a boy of 10 at the time of his confirma- tion. This photograph is said to be very like him as he was when years later Henri Gervex did a pastel portrait of him. (See Plate facing page 352) . . . . .	80
Views of Yvetôt Seminary as it is to-day . . . . .	86
Courtyard of the Lycée Corneille at Rouen . . . . .	94
Typical Norman Peasant-Farmer's Farm in the Maupassant Country, which may have served for the scene of scores of his tales of the Norman Peasants (Photo by E. Pireaux) . . . . .	94
Portrait of Jules de Maupassant, Guy's Grandfather (By Courtesy of M. Henri Defontaine) . . . . .	120



# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS—Continued.

	FACING PAGE
Portrait of Guy de Maupassant, at age of 31, when his Literary Career began. (By Courtesy of M. Henri Defontaine)	132
Portrait of Maupassant, representing him as born at Fécamp (See French text below picture)	132
Facsimile of manuscript of one of Maupassant's Poems in " <i>Des Vers</i> "	148
Portrait of Guy de Maupassant	160
Rue des Cordeliers in Rouen, an evil street in the Norman Suburra, where Maupassant heard the story of " <i>La Maison Tellier</i> "	160
Flaubert's Study at Croisset, where Maupassant used to meet all the literary celebrities of his day, and where Flaubert died and Guy rendered him the last services (By Courtesy of M. Henri Defontaine)	180
Zola's Country House at Médan, where " <i>Les Soirées de Médan</i> ," in which " <i>Boule-de-Suif</i> " first appeared, was projected	180
Facsimile of Maupassant's declaration of aversion from having his portrait published, with a faked picture of him as he was at the time of writing " <i>Notre Cœur</i> "	220
Present aspect of Father Didon's Cell	254
The Dominican Monastery at Corbara in Corsica, where Maupassant visited Father Didon	254
Caricature of Guy de Maupassant	262
Facsimile of Manuscript of " <i>Une Vie</i> "	262
Rocks and Beach at Etretat, showing scene where Guy saved Swinburne from drowning	292
Maupassant rowing ladies out to " <i>Bel-Ami</i> "	292
Marie Bashkirtseff, with facsimile of her signature	298
" <i>La Guillette</i> ," Maupassant's House at Etretat	304
Portrait of Guy de Maupassant at the time of the Bashkirtseff letters	304
Scenes at Antibes: (1 and 2) Views from Maupassant's House (3) The Headland at Cap d'Antibes, where he used to think out love-passages as described to Madame de Nouy	338
Pastel Portrait of Maupassant by Henri Gervex Said to remind one of his portrait as a boy of 10 (See Plate facing page 80)	352
Rue de l'Eau-de-Rebec in Rouen, scene of the story " <i>Qui Sait</i> ," where a man's furniture moves in and out of his house, which was considered the first tale in which he showed signs of insanity	352
Last Portrait of Maupassant, showing havoc worked	364
Facsimiles of 1st and 4th pages of Guy's Last Letter to his Mother, showing signs of his mental condition	378
Entrance to Dr Bianche's Lunatic Asylum in Passy	382
The Chalet de l'Isère, Cannes, where Maupassant attempted suicide	382
Facsimile of Guy's Certificate of Baptism	388
Facsimile of Maupassant's Death-Certificate with its careless errata	388
Maupassant Coat of Arms	See Front End-paper.

## PREFACE

**M**R GUY DE MAUPASSANT was a man of large and robust body and of a strong and active mind; yet, as in the most solid rocks, veins of unsound substance are often discovered, there was in him a mixture of that disease, the nature of which eludes the most minute inquiry, though the effects are well known to be a weariness of life, an unconcern about those things which agitate the greater part of mankind and a general sensation of gloomy wretchedness.

In common fairness the whole of the above passage should have been put in inverted commas and the first four words should have been but three, giving another name. As a matter of fact the passage was lifted (with the calm insouciance of a Prince de Montenevoso shifting Maupassant phrases, situations and even plots) from Boswell's *Life* and refers of course to Mr Michael Johnson. It seemed to me a passage of singular application to the subject of this biography. To-day, however, the nature of the disease which produced in poor Guy that "general sensation of gloomy wretchedness" which translated itself in his books into an almost unvarying pessimism no longer eludes inquiry. It began to be understood in 1905, when Schaudlyn discovered the tréponème to which the

## PREFACE

specific name of pallid spirochaet is given. Since then science has established the following equation :

General Paralysis of the Insane = Tréponème.

Pallid Spirochaet = Tréponème.

∴ G.P.I. = Pallid Spirochaet.

It is not longer a question of 90% of these mournful cases arising from the disease. The disease is the sole cause, and on this the medical corps is now completely satisfied. It is an axiom. This fact was triumphantly established about ten years ago by the French doctors.\*

Some lamentable consolation can be drawn by the friends and admirers of the great man from the certitude thus afforded that many of the deplorable peculiarities of his conduct proceeded not from any turpitude of character but were the usual manifestations of the disease which athwart a Bedlam nightmare was to lead this fine and noble man, of intellect so lofty, to insanity and death. In fact it explains everything in this book, which may prompt people to question by what hallucination of piety and love I have put on my title-page after my hero's name, the words : *Gentilhomme de Lettres*. It explains his lies, his boasting, his fondness for salacious conversation, his cruelty to animals, even that almost incomprehensible mania to which Flaubert refers in a letter to Zola as to writings on the wall. It explains everything under the fierce light that has at last been thrown on the

\* Cf. Dr Lagriffe, *Etude de psychologie pathologique*, Paris, 1909.

## PREFACE

Monster of infinitesimal size but Himalayan mischief that has worked such havoc on humanity and still will do so if the lesson is not learned, to which the life of Guy de Maupassant is a humble tribute. As to which Monster, it does seem that, anticipating its discovery, exposure, investment, capture and certain eventual extermination, after a foul tyranny over poor Occidental humanity since the days of Christopher Columbus, it decided to close its clandestine career of atrocity by the immolation of victims amongst the brightest and fairest intellects of the world. The list of its distinguished sufferers during the past forty years is an appalling one. Hundreds of men, great and pleasant, were hurried (some even to infamy for acts for which the Monster and not they, poor souls, were responsible) to Aeldama.

It was about forty years ago that I first projected writing a book on Guy de Maupassant and indeed had come to some sort of arrangement about such a work at a luncheon with John Lane at the Café Royal. I am glad now that I did not carry that intention into effect at the time, seeing in what utter darkness one must perforce have approached the subject. Later on, after Maupassant's death, it was proposed to me by the late Hugues Rebell (who, I am glad to say, is at last coming to his own in the world of letters in France) that we should do a book on Maupassant together, there being in Rebell's possession or at his disposal a collection of love-letters written by poor Guy towards the end of his life to the woman whom

## PREFACE

François calls "*la femme fatale*," the interest in which was that possibly these were the only wooing letters that Guy ever wrote. Till then, Guy had never wooed. The wild pursuit was not his. He was incessantly pursued, often to his distaste. The stories of his extreme profligacy and fickleness are falsehoods. I once heard him say, and Monsieur Camille Oudinot if he be still alive can vouch for the saying: "I have never left a woman." It was they who, having used him for their purposes, turned to other victims. He was courted in the most shameless way. It is difficult to believe the story that M. Oudinot tells that one day in a round-about way Maupassant received from a Scotch nobleman, together with a scented, gold-embroidered cushion, the "adorable portrait of a young woman," the peer's married daughter, together with a letter begging him to come and stay with them at their mansion near Glasgow as his daughter worshipped him and had embroidered the cushion as a token of her love. Difficult to believe, but true, as Maupassant and I once played football at *La Guillette* with the cushion scented and gold-worked.

Hugues Rebell's proposal was made in 1895 and would under other circumstances have been welcomed, but at that time I was writhing under the whip of Fate at the downfall and destruction of a greatly beloved friend, had tossed my quill to the winds and was contemplating *La Trappe* or at least *Corbara* in Corsica, under Father Didon.

What eventually decided me to write this book were

## PREFACE

some words spoken to me in public by Monsieur de Monzie at the inauguration of the Maupassant statue in the park at Miromesnil, the place of Guy's birth, after I had addressed the meeting on the subject of the great man whom we had gathered to honour. That was in September of last year. Since that day until this the book has been my sole preoccupation, and I may conscientiously declare that I have given to it what powers life's batterings of body and brain have left me in the depths of disillusionment. And this is perhaps the best plea that I was not unfitted for the task, because if no man could better have written Maupassant's life than Maupassant himself, it may be not without interest to read the life of a pessimist described by one who having every reason for "a vile melancholy," is yet an optimist before what I call in my book "the extraordinary beneficence of creation."

Many of the photographs in Normandy, Rouen, Antibes and Corsica were specially taken under my supervision for this book, for others I am indebted to the kindness of their owners.

In conclusion I have to express gratitude for kind assistance and encouragement afforded me during my work to H. E. Monsieur A. de Monzie, Jacques Blanche, the painter, son of Doctor Blanche, Monsieur Henri Defontaine, the publisher and bookseller at Rouen, Monsieur Edmond Spalikowski of *La Dépêche de Rouen*, Monsieur Labrosse, head librarian, Monsieur Delavigne, assistant librarian, besides

## PREFACE

Monsieur Isaac and the whole of the staff of the splendid Municipal Library at Rouen, Monsieur E. Pireaux, of the Ecole des Métiers at Lille, who is responsible for several of my best pictures, Monsieur Raymond Bazin of Dieppe, of the Maupassant Committee, Monsieur Langlet, schoolmaster at Tourville sur Arques, where Maupassant was christened, and of course to Mr Werner Laurie, who has had the courage to assume the responsibility of this book and has given me the opportunity of recording my admiration for one of the finest writers in the French language and a man who as to his fellow-men is like Fabre to another kind of insect.

ROBERT HARBOROUGH SHERARD.

Château Michelet,  
Bihorel-lès-Rouen (S.I.),  
France.  
2nd Germinal, An. 134.

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. . . . .	1
II. . . . .	11
III. . . . .	23
IV. . . . .	36
V. . . . .	51
VI. . . . .	66
VII. . . . .	77
VIII. . . . .	90
IX. . . . .	105
X. . . . .	119
XI. . . . .	129
XII. . . . .	142
XIII. . . . .	155
XIV. . . . .	168
XV. . . . .	181
XVI. . . . .	197
XVII. . . . .	210
XVIII. . . . .	222
XIX. . . . .	240
XX. . . . .	257
XXI. . . . .	272
XXII. . . . .	284
XXIII. . . . .	298
XXIV. . . . .	312
XXV. . . . .	327
XXVI. . . . .	341
XXVII. . . . .	352
XXVIII. . . . .	369





## CHAPTER I

A Local Item—The Woman called Legay—A Debt of Seven Francs—The Suburra of Rouen—Adrienne's True Story—Her Merchant Lover—Her Diligence Journeys to Visit Him—Under Observation at Tôtes—The "Moblot" with the Liquid Eyes—Her References to Him.

ON the morning of the 19th of August, 1892, the readers of *Le Journal de Rouen*, the excellent daily published in the capital of Normandy, would not fail to notice, published as an item of some importance in the *Chronique Locale*, and not merely as a *fait-divers*, the following paragraph :

"In consequence of troubles of an altogether private nature, Madame Adrienne L——, dressmaker, aged 44 and living rue des Charrettes, attempted yesterday afternoon to suffocate herself by means of a brasier, filled with burning charcoal.

"It was one of her fellow-lodgers, who having knocked at Mme. L——'s door, to ask her to return a flat-iron, which she had lent her the previous evening, was surprised to receive no answer and went and informed the landlord.

"The lodginghouse keeper, having duplicate keys to the doors of all the rooms he let out, came and opened the door and saw Mme. L—— stretched out on her bed, breathing imperceptibly.

"Thanks to the attentions immediately given in a prodigal way by M. the Doctor Rocher and by M. Motte, chemist, this despairing woman soon recovered consciousness; however, owing to the condition of extreme exhaustion in which she found herself, it was necessary to convey her to the Hôtel Dieu Hospital, where she was at once admitted, as an urgent case. •

"In her room there were found on a table two letters, one addressed to the Commissary of Police and the other to her landlord, in which she announced her intention of having done with existence." • •

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

More than one reader having reached this point would exclaim : “ Adrienne L——? Why that must be the Legay woman ! So that’s how she has written the last chapter of her life ! ”

And they were quite correct in their surmise, these readers. The dying “ dressmaker ” *was* the Legay woman. Adrienne, like that other Adrienne, the Lecouvreur one gay, gay. Gay by name, once gay by nature and gay by trade !

Or rather had been. For in the last days, indeed in the last years, the market-men that buy the white and brown had had small heed of her. For one thing she had lost her looks, for another she was shabby, almost ragged, for another it was obvious that she took morphia injections, for another she lived in a squalid slum and then wasn’t there some story that twenty years ago this French woman had had intimate relations with the Prussians? Wasn’t it she who in an inn on the road between Havre and Rouen had passed a night with a Prussian officer?

These questions were soon to be answered, not later indeed than in the paper for the following Sunday, where the news was given that the rue des Charrettes sempstress had died in hospital the day previous. It was not stated that her exhaustion had been caused by a long period of semi-starvation, nor that when she was dead her body, being claimed by nobody, had been wheelbarrowed into the dissecting-room, to serve for medical instruction and anatomizings, nor finally that her mangled remains, bundled after service into a deal

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

coffin, had been lowered into a nameless pauper's grave. What was stated was that this was indeed the Legay woman, the most famous harlot in the scarlet annals of harlotry; and her story was retold.

At that same time, in a padded cell in a luxurious house in a park at Passy, possibly, as he sometimes was, strangling in a strait-waistcoat, was a man of about her own age, raving of limitless wealth, or of sappers working towards him underground with fearful intent, or of little twigs which he had planted in the garden outside which were to be visited the year following-when they would be found to be so many little children of his own illustrious name. This was the man who had made her famous, so famous that as long as the French language is spoken she will be read about and discussed, and her story laughed at or bemoaned. He was to outlive her but a few months, but he to lie in marble.

It was a matter of a debt of seven francs, which in those days were worth about 5s. 10d., a debt of this amount to her lodginghouse keeper for a month's rent, added, no doubt, to such other vexations as absence of food and especially of all means of purchasing morphine for use in the Pravaz syringe which fell from her ragged pocket as they carried her downstairs from her attic in the rue des Charrettes, as constant rebuffs when she sought for employment, and, perhaps more than anything, the crowning sorrow of remembering what she had been once in this city of Rouen and how she had been dressed in the old,

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

imperial days, while now, . . . which drove her to purchase, with her very last coppers, the charcoal whose fumes, from *two* braziers, were to bring surcease and enlargement.

This rue des Charrettes, which to-day is as it was then, is the highroad and main street through what is now, as it was then, the Suburra of Rouen. It starts from the Place Henri-Quatre, whence the carriers' carts used to depart in every direction, and where in Madame Legay's last year the one surviving diligence had its point of departure and arrival. This diligence used to start from outside the inn of the Vieux Palais, and would remind Adrienne Legay of a certain diligence that made her famous and took her by devious ways to glory, distress, destitution and. . . .

It is a street full of wine-shops and drinking-kens. To the right and left as one walks from the Place Henri-Quatre are quaint, mediaeval houses, crooked little streets with names which evoke a more pictorial past, Rue du Petit-Prévôt (Street of the Minor Provost), a lesser magistrate whose province it would be to scourge the small fry of evil-doers, loose women for instance; Rue de la Haranguerie, Rue du Vicomté, Rue des Vergetiers. Saints also, of course, Saint Eloi, and a short cut from Adrienne's house, No. 44, the rue Jacques le Lieur, which might lead a tired soul right down to the river's edge that would bear her, the very weariest woman, somewhere safe to sea.

No. 44 rue des Charrettes may still be seen, though, not a soul in Rouen seems to know that it was here on

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

the second floor, whose large windows look out on the murky street, that thirty-three years ago in the jocund month of August so sad a thing occurred. Even the present commissary of police, successor in direct line to the Monsieur Hitte to whom the Legay woman wrote a letter, had no knowledge whatever of the exact address of la nommée Legay, la fille Legay, and though he kindly caused archives to be searched and was interested in this literary research, could give no information, but with shrugging shoulders asked one *franchement* to admit that the Police could not be expected to keep the records of the suicide of a "public woman" thirty-three years ago.

The house is not of sinister appearance. On the ground floor is a greengrocer who combines with his *fruiterie* a dairy business also. There is a drinking shop opposite to it. There are two large windows on the first and second floors. If one wonders how a person living on this second floor, for a room where to-day she would certainly be charged not less than 60 or 80 francs a month, was paying only 7 francs a month, or rather wanting to pay them, any elderly citizen of Rouen will tell him that in those days in this rue des Charrettes street and district, the usual rent for a furnished room was 5 francs a month, and that the highest rent there did not exceed 10 francs. There is nothing mediaeval about No. 44 except the roof, in which there are two stories of garrets, while at the very top is a window which pushes up like the lid of a snuff-box, a red-tiled, sharply

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

slanting roof, which reminds one of the garretted pantiles of Strasburg.

Here lived, in 1892, and here entered into the Valley of the Shadow, *la fille* Legay, *la nommée* Adrienne, trying to earn a living (and a sufficiency of morphine withal) with the needle that formerly had been plied so vigorously for her by the big dress-makers of Paris and of Rouen.

"This woman," wrote the *Petit Rouennais* after her death, "had for a long time past asked of regular manual labour her means of existence and worked at sewing. Without work at present, and despairing of finding any anywhere, she wrote two letters," and so on.

"This woman" was born in 1848 at Eletot, which is a village of some 850 inhabitants in the canton of Valmont, from which canton a celebrated writer was to take one of his *noms de guerre*. It is situated about 8 kilometres (5 miles) from Fécamp. Mademoiselle Legay did not like peasant life; she longed for the glories and splendours of the great city. She was like the Jenny that Rossetti wrote of, "fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea," or rather of many guineas, for the Queens of la Cascade, even provincial, were rapacious, rapacious in the spacious days of Napoleon the Third. So when she was about twenty years old she went up to Rouen to try her fortune and to offer her wares of youth and beauty to those market-men of whom Swinburne speaks. She is first heard of as the mistress of a cavalry officer. She was described at that

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

time as very attractive. She was plump; very plump and fat women were then, as they always are in the East, much run after by the male. It was not so long since then that Théophile Gautier had exclaimed :

*"Au diable les grands sentiments et les femmes maigres."*

How nicely plump she was appears from a description given of her by a famous writer who knew in her early days :

" Small, rounded everywhere, fat as bacon, with a skin taut and shining, and an enormous bosom which bulged up under her dress, she remained none the less appetizing and run after, so pleasant was her freshness to look at. Her face was a red-cheeked apple, a peony bud just about to burst into flower; and in this face there opened in the upper part two black, magnificent eyes, shaded by long thick eyelashes which threw a shade upon them; in the lower part of the face was a charming mouth, narrow, moist for kisses, garnished with brilliant and tiny teeth. She was further, it was said, full of inestimable qualities."

The profession of arms not being a lucrative one, the association of Adrienne with the cavalry officer lasted only a short time, and *la fille* Legay is next seen as the *bonne amie* of a wealthy merchant of Rouen cotton goods. He was a generous man, and Adrienne knew the roses and indeed the raptures of vice. She is described as having been an intelligent woman, and it is said that she and the cotton goods man really loved each other. Indeed when in 1870 war broke out and the cotton goods man, being mobilized, was drafted to Havre, Adrienne could not follow him, she contrived to visit him in his seaside garrison as often



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

as permission could be obtained from the military authorities. On these occasions she would drive in her brougham from her luxurious flat at Mont-St.-Aignan down to a slum street called rue des Charrettes, whence started the diligence by which she had to travel to Havre. On the way this diligence used to stop at the Swan Inn at Tôtes, where horses were changed.

The people of Rouen, of course, could not approve of Mademoiselle Legay's manner of life, and they thought it disgraceful that such a person should live in such scandalous luxury; but everyone admitted that she had a good heart, and none more readily than the wives, sweethearts and relatives of other Rouen lads who on mobilization had been drafted to Havre, because Adrienne never failed on her return from these journeys by diligence, the object of which is not too closely to be enquired into, to bring to them news of their absent and possibly beloved ones in uniform so far away.

It was in the course of one of these diligence journeys that Adrienne and her fellow-travellers were noticed by a young moblot, not very tall but of Herculean build, who had thick brown hair and a vigorous moustache, but who might specially have been noticed by magnificent-eyed Adrienne because of the great beauty of his Creole eyes. It was in the kitchen that may still be seen in the Swan Inn at Tôtes that the encounter took place, which in literary significance was to be at least as important as that of the Abbé



SWAN INN AT TÓIES, WHERE THE SUPPER-PARTY IN "ROULE DE SUIF" TOOK PLACE.



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

Prévost and the gang of girls for Virginia and the Carolines in the kitchen of the inn at Pacy-sur-Eure.

The observation of the diligence party by the sturdy young soldier was unobtrusive in the extreme. Not one of the party can ever have thought that they were being scrutinized by one who even at that early age had trained his eyes to observe so closely, with such acute scrutiny, that the very souls, the more hidden motives of those within their purview were laid bare. It was this young man who later, explaining to his manservant the process by which he had attained such acuity of observation, was to say: "Look you, François, to see well and to distinguish well, one's eye must be trained, and to get to that point one must notice everything when one is looking; never be satisfied with 'almost everything'; give one's eyes all the time necessary to see everything that has to be noted, to define things well, to rout out, as it were, the things that one does not see very well, and it is only by long and patient exercise that one arrives at the point of being able to get from one's eyes all that they are capable of. Even the best artists must take pains, a great deal of pains, to form their eyes so that these shall be really good and serviceable."

To her last breath Adrienne denied the truth of the part she was alleged to have played in the little drama that was enacted at the Swan Inn at Tôtes some time later, when, for the very good reason that the Prussians were then masters of that town, the observant

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

young man with the liquid eyes who was a soldier was not present.

As to the liquid eyes and the scrutinizing glances, Adrienne had attributed these latter to a very different motive than psycho-analysis. In those days the fresh, plump *fille* Legay was always being stared at. She thought she knew what the young moblot wanted of her, and it was on this presumption that she used to say later that the reason she had been written about and accused of having yielded to the Prussian commandant—a thing she most indignantly denied—was that she had refused the young man's advances. "I didn't like him," she used to say, adding with delightful naiveté: "Besides, how was I to know that he was going to become famous?"\*

\* On Saturday, September 12th, 1921, there appeared in *Rouen Gazette*, from the pen of M. Henri Bridoux, an article declaring that he had witnessed a meeting between Boule-de-Suif and the former moblot. Adrienne is described as a woman of forty or over. This was between 1880 and 1885 and Adrienne Legay was born in 1848. Boule-de-Suif was in a box at the Rouen Folies-Bergère and the young writer, who at that time paid frequent visits to Rouen, to visit his friend Robert Pinchon, was there also one night. He had never seen Boule-de-Suif, states Monsieur Bridoux, and had only heard of her story and heroic sacrifice from his uncle Cord'homme. He was told who the fat middle-aged woman was and "looked at her a long time with curiosity and prolonged attention almost emotional. Then he left us and we saw him a moment later entering the box where the lady was, greeting her with a deep bow, the bow of a gallant mousquetaire, and seating himself next to her." Later on he is seen supping at the Hôtel du Mans with Boule-de-Suif. The writer in question very rarely visited Rouen after Flaubert's death in 1880 and the Boule-de-Suif in question cannot for several reasons have been *the* woman whom he made notorious.

•

## CHAPTER II

Adrienne's Patriotism—Von Burg's Proclamation—How Adrienne Reacted—Her Fatal Kindness of Heart—Her adopted Son—A Man She Loved—She Tries Fortune-Telling—The Song of The Shirt—The End of It All—A Lady's Comment There-on—Had Maupassant known!—His Kindness of Heart.

**C**ERTAINLY Adrienne's bearing towards the Prussian invaders on other occasions seems good evidence against the truth of the story of her complacency. This was at the time of the Prussian occupation of Rouen. When it had been announced that Prince Frederick William proposed to make a solemn and triumphant entry into the Norman city, many of the burghers hung out black flags and funeral draperies from their windows. To this manifestation of their lack of popularity with the vanquished, the Germans made an immediate and emphatic retort. The day following the one on which Rouen was draped in black, an official poster was placarded on the city walls, the text of which ran as follows :

### COMMUNICATION.

The Commander-in-Chief requests the Royal Commandature to convey to the Mayor's Office that by the fact that black flags have been hoisted on a number of houses in Rouen, it becomes obvious that a great number of houses in the city are unoccupied and therefore available for military quarters and that approximately 10,000 men can be accommodated in these houses.

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

In order to spare the troops from long marches for billets round Rouen it may be foreseen that several battalions will enter the town to-morrow.

These troops will for the most part be quartered in the houses where black flags are flying.

Rouen, 10th March, 1871

Signed VON BURG.

If Herr von Burg had imagined that this threat would intimidate the people of Rouen, he showed ignorance of the character of the Normans. One of their quiddities is a strong aversion from strangers and aliens. During the recent war, when Rouen was practically an English city again for the first time since the fifteenth century, an uneasy feeling persisted amongst the Rouennais that the English had come for good, had no intention of ever evacuating the place, "for where you English"—as was said to many English officers—"once set your foot, you never go away."

Von Burg's "communication" piqued everyone who so far had hesitated, and black flags and draperies were hung out everywhere. Not last, not the least emphatic in her display, was *la nommée* Legay. Of an old black shawl she made a banner to tell the Germans of the melancholy that their advent produced in her and her household. The very same day a billeting sergeant roistered into her flat and told her to make ready to receive twelve German soldiers. Adrienne locks the door, pushes the key under it, and finds another lodging.

So she didn't like to have it said of her, and so said

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

that all the world could hear, that she had pandered to the Prussians. She had refused them, under penalties that von Burg could tell about, access to her house. Was it likely she would grant one of them access to her chamber?

It was always said of *la fille* Legay that she had a good heart, a very bad equipment in this world, and for the *fille de joie* very worst of all. The story of her adopted child is still related in Rouen. A woman of her class, a *reine de la cascade*, having fallen ill of a consumption, was tenderly nursed by Adrienne, but in vain. When the woman was about to die, she spoke of her baby and told how great was her grief at leaving that bit of a boy to the mercies of the world as she knew it. Adrienne comforted her. "I'll take the child," she said. "He shall live with me, and I will bring him up." *La fille* Legay most faithfully kept her promise to her dead sister in sin. She reared the child, she sent him to a good private school where she used to visit him. When he had leave, she used to take him to theatres and concerts. Everybody in Rouen thought he was her little boy, and men wondered which of them might be his sire. When he had grown up Adrienne gets him a good job in the office of a spinning concern. The post is a good one in the matter of prospects, but the pay is small and the young man has constantly to apply to Madame Legay for supplements. Her purse is always open to him. She is reputed the most generous of women.

The things that really happened to the gay Legay,



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

and the accounts of how men and women of the bourgeois class behaved to the kind-hearted woman, would have furnished the Creole-eyed young writer, keen to observe, pitiless to flagellate, with even better subjects for his irony than the mythical story of her intimacy, for a noble purpose, with one of the torturers of her country.

The adopted son, in the first place. When the hour comes that he must have his "papers" and establish his identity, his "Who's Who" for the military authorities and the conscription lottery, he discovers that Legay is not his mother and that his name is another one. He comes to the rapid conclusion that any further association with a woman of no morality, who has no blood-claim upon him, cannot but be prejudicial to his interests, will compromise him. So he goes off to his garrison without letting her know where he is. He never writes to her once, not even to ask for money, heroic chap! After leaving the service, he gets married. Adrienne only casually hears of his marriage through strangers. She writes to him, tells him of her love for him, tells him she would like to know his bride, a daughter for her. He leaves her letters unanswered, indeed it is said that he throws them aside unopened. Adrienne Legay never sees her adopted son again. He seems to have known of her whereabouts when she was in deepest misery, but that he did nothing for her transpires from the fact that she killed herself in a slum because she could not pay seven francs to her landlord.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

What a story, say, Guy de Maupassant could have made from these materials. Is it possible that it was this that inspired him with the plot of the tale entitled *Aux Champs*? Here ingratitude and cruel desertion reward the peasant mother who would not give her son as a child to be adopted by rich people. The son's cupidity and envy are aroused by the sight of the prosperity of the youth adopted in his stead, the child of a neighbour who had not his mother's scruples. "Look you," he says to his parents, "I feel sure enough that I had better not stay here, because I should be reproaching you with this, morning and night, and I should make your life a wretched one. That, you see, I can never forgive you." And as he leaves the house, "Manants!" (Clodhoppers), he cries and disappears into the night.

The lover who was liked, next. A certain Doctor B, for whom she had real affection and had hoped, as age was approaching, to live with *en faux ménage* for the rest of her days. She had great faith in her lover's medical science, so one day when a sister sinner fell ill and could find no relief at the hands of the Rouen *hommes de l'art*, Adrienne sends her pseudo-husband to her. There is an English music-hall song which says: "Never introduce your Donah to a Pal." The opposite holds good also, as the Legay woman was to discover. The sick sister had a sum of 40,000 francs, so the doctor deserts Adrienne and marries his new patient with her £1600. Adrienne is now altogether disillusioned about men and looks for a living no

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

longer from their chary largesses, but in the world of commerce. She takes over a small café at the bottom of the rue Nationale, the very café where Flaubert makes Madame Bovary keep tryst with the puny Leon. But a good heart is no equipment for business success in any town, and least of all in a town in Normandy. Adrienne soon fails; everything she possesses, furniture, toilettes, jewels, are seized and sold. She has now none of the properties requisite for plying her former trade, even had she had heart for it. So now, reduced to living in squalid furnished rooms, Adrienne tells fortunes. She reads futures with cards and in the dregs of coffee. It is the beginning of the end. From one *garni* to another she flits, carrying her greasy pack of cards with her. Also a Pravaz syringe, for she had become a morphia addict. But morphia costs money, and poor Adrienne rarely had the wherewithal to indulge the fierce craving. It is said that to get at least the sensation of the soothing *pique*, she used to fill her syringe with water when morphine was unobtainable. Then one day friends find her enough money to take the boat and go to H——, in Calvados, where she had a brother, who offered her the refuge of his home. But she yearned for Rouen, the scene of her triumphs, and soon returned there. Fortune-telling affording not even the barest living—Adrienne was now a wreck of her former self, and so shabby that people did not like to approach her—the poor Legay tried to sing in her turn the Song of the Shirt. The papers testify to her real

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

endeavours and to her constant failure. People would not like to employ a sempstress who came from the rue des Charrettes, still less to give her material to take home with her. Her wages would have reached eighteenpence a day.

The rue des Charrettes is a highway through evil places. The straight broad rue Jeanne d'Arc cuts this sordid quarter in twain as though the Virgin Martyr had cloven with the broadsword that did such work at Orleans and Patay, cloven with one mighty stroke this foul agglomeration, laying it in two parts, one to the east and one to the west, the straight clear street, which cuts the rue des Charrettes at right angles, lying across the land of lupanar and crimp like a falchion blade. Drink, riot and lust to the right; alcohol, clamour and carnality to the left.

And ever at Adrienne's heart a bitter and rancorous feeling that but for the writing man with the fine eyes the *tempo dei dolci sospiri* might have lasted still; so that when, in the first days of 1892, she reads in *Le Petit Rouennais* of his attempted suicide at Cannes, she might have felt satisfaction had it not been for that foolish good-heartedness of her. For here—and she blamed him for it—she found herself in a real and palpable hell. Here she was, plunged up to the neck in the horrid quagmire of stale sin. The staleness of sin, which Ranger Gull formulated first, that is the horror and the penalty of it. Day and night in that riverside quarter, the riot of mechanical music, ribald songs, painted faces, reeling drunkards, vomit

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

on the pavements, affrays between Norwegian sailors and the descendants of Norsemen of a thousand years ago. And why she blamed him most was that, as he had shown in his story, he knew, he knew what would be the feeling towards her, the Frenchwoman who had yielded to a Prussian. He had depicted it and must have known that, even as her comrades in the diligence had cast her out after the sacrifice, so would the larger bourgeoisie of the wider world.

The most terrible hell—one that even Dante did not conceive—would be a place where for eternity the sinner should be forced to practise his sin, should never be free from it day nor night, for ever and ever and ever. This was the hell in which Adrienne found herself in the last days. Fortunately for her there was no prospect of eternity of sojourn. There was a way out. One could get it for a trifle at the *charbonnier*, or one might pick it up on the quays where the charcoal boats had been unladen.

Her aimless ramble through the Charrettes quartier would take her up the mediaeval rue Frigori into the rue des Carmes, and after a few slouching steps she would be brought up gasping by the sight of the great cathedral, upon which one never comes without the leaping of one's heart and a great sigh of amazed delight. Then past Fardeau Street—aye, a heavy fardel hers—and then along the street of the great clock, the clock which has been marking heavy hours for centuries past. Under the arch, where Christ is seen, the Good Shepherd among His *sneép*, and round



NO. 44, RUE DES CHARRELLES, ROUEN, WHERE  
ADRIENNE LEGAY COMMITTED SUICIDE.



PORTRAIT OF MADAME FEUTRY, NÉE DUNET, OF  
TOURVILLE-SUR-ARQUES, WHO REMEMBERS THE  
BIRTH OF MAUTASSANT IN 1850.  
(*Photo by M. Langlet.*)



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

by the little rue des Vergetiers, and then down the street of the Cordeliers which once was full of convents and is so still if one gives to the word convent the signification that Lafontaine gave to it. Here to the right and to the left matrons leer and beckon, but not to Legay women. The staleness of sin! Then to the left into the rue des Charrettes, a last climb of the rickety stairs, the second floor reached, and then . . . ! The rest was of the province of worthy Monsieur Hitte, commissary of police.

And some time later, a lady in mourning, passing dim days by candle-light in broad noon, in a luxurious villa on the Mediterranean, referring to this Rouen local item, said :

“ The unfortunate woman died recently quite penniless. Some people pretend that she killed herself, not having the courage to suffer destitution any longer. I was informed too late of her situation, otherwise I would have helped her. No doubt some people would have blamed me for approaching a creature of that description. But I should have done my duty. After all, this prostitute had had in her lifetime one sublime hour. And my son was certainly indebted to her to some extent.” ! ! !

This lady was Madame Laure de Maupassant; the son to whom she refers was Guy de Maupassant, and “ this prostitute ” was Boule de Suif.

Madame Laure de Maupassant's comment on the death of Adrienne Legay, her “ if I had only known,” her “ too late,” and especially the reference to the



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

“sublime hour” which Boule de Suif had enjoyed through being pilloried as a Prussian’s leman, are reluctantly quoted, as they throw a light on the character of the woman who was Guy de Maupassant’s mother, the woman from whom he took his early training, and to some extent his first views on life, on men and women.

That Guy de Maupassant himself was unaware of the wretched pass to which Adrienne had come in her last years is evident from the fact that the poor woman was allowed to perish miserably. Of course in the last months of her life the world was closed to Guy de Maupassant, who was at the time in Dr Blanche’s establishment. But in 1891, while he was still at large and still had his reason? That he did nothing to help her is the proof that he knew nothing of her condition. He has left behind him a record of kindness and generosity, of large-handed, even reckless charity. Let two witnesses, one his body-servant, the other the poet and Academician, José Maria de Heredia, be quoted. François, the valet, writes in the preface of his book on his master: “I allow myself to publish some souvenirs so that it shall be made well known that my Master, who has been recognised a *Man of great talent*, was something still better, for he was in a supreme degree Kind, Straight and Loyal.”

At the inauguration of the Maupassant monument at Rouen, José de Heredia, in the course of his speech described his last parting from Maupassant, on the

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

road to Monte Carlo, and after quoting his poignantly sad account of his sufferings and his fears, added : “ He no longer took pleasure in anything, *even in doing acts of kindness.*”

Again here is the testimony of an American authoress of “ great beauty ” and cosmopolitan fame, spoken towards the end of Maupassant’s life. She had sent for his body-servant to come to her bedside, where she was lying in the shadow of death, and had asked him to talk to her about him, nothing but about him. “ It is a subject,” she said, “ on which you will never tire me.” He relates, “ after my having spoken to her at great length, as she had asked me, she said to me with some slight emotion in her voice : ‘ Yes, my good François, you have nearly understood him, this man who never reveals his true self, for one must have lived in his intimacy as I have done to grasp his nature. . . . And do you know, I don’t only love your master as a writer, I love him for himself, as we say in my country, *for his good heart, for his extreme loyalty and for his great kindness.* There on my table, d’ye see, I have, all written out, the conversation I had with him the day before yesterday. The dear, good friend stayed with me the whole afternoon and didn’t seem able to tear himself away. That is because we neither of us knew whether that would not be our very last meeting in this world ; for, my poor François, in two or three days I am going to be operated on for a cyst, and one never knows how that sort of thing may end. But be sure and tell my friend

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

Maupassant that if I peg out under the chloroform, my last thought will have been for him.' ”

This lady, who had “ magnificent golden hair,” and whose novels translated by herself were published widely in France, had years previously been Maupassant’s guest down at *La Guillette*, and used at table to discuss sexual matters very freely with her host. Maupassant had been at great pains to make the guest-room comfortable for her, saw that there was a supply of pins, a sufficiency of rice-powder and a triple mirror. François says she was as intelligent as she was beautiful, and that one day when her maid was late and her breakfast tray was outside her door, she called to him to bring it in. “ Come on, François,” she cried, “ you can come into my room and put the tray on my table. It won’t trouble me in the least; I am covered up in bed.”

One wonders whether the excellent François ever heard of another great lady, who, being asked how she could allow a footman to enter her bedroom or boudoir, exclaimed : “ Why, you don’t call *that* a man, do you? ”

### CHAPTER III

Madame Catherine of Tourville—A Hurry-Call from the Château—What Madame Feutry Remembers after Seventy-five Years—The Mystery of Miromesnil—Guy's Birthplace Contested—George Normandy's Argument—The Good Chancellor—Self-Torture Not Abolished.

**T**HERE is still to-day living in the village of Tourville-sur-Arques, a typical Normandy *bourg*, situated about eight kilometres from Dieppe, with a distant view of the Channel, a woman of the farming class, aged eighty, who well remembers how one day in August—the 5th, was it?—she does not say No—in the year 1850, a hurry-call came from the Château de Miromesnil, the big house of the commune, asking for Madame Catherine Saunier, to come at once, as she was urgently wanted by the lady who was the new tenant there. She was wanted to help Madame de Maupassant find a little baby in the park. Madame Feutry is the name of the peasant woman who remembers this incident. She was a little Dunet girl then and Madame Catherine was the old midwife, nurse and baby farmer (in no evil sense) with whom she had been boarded by her parents. Madame Catherine was delighted with the message. It was a tribute to her that the new people at the Château should demand her services. They were well-to-do folk too, “living on their revenues,” and the job might be a profitable one.

As the little Dunet girl could not be left alone in

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

the cottage, Madame Catherine "took me pick-a-back," relates Madame Feutry, "and off she trotted to the château," a good long trot for an old woman, so laden. They returned, however, very shortly afterwards and Madame Catherine seemed sad, *trés triste*. It appears that Madame Laure de Maupassant considered Madame Catherine much too common-looking, too *croquant*, too *manant*, to be allowed to accompany her in the quest of a son and heir to the noble family of Maupassant in the park which had once been the estate of the great Chancellor, Hue de Miromesnil. So Catherine was sent about her business and the common little Dunct girl with her, which was a great pity, as the lady of the château seemed in great pain. It was a great pity also because Madame Saunier would have been later a witness to testify to the actual birth of the child in the château on that 5th day of August, a fact which has persistently been disputed since and is so to this day, with the fatal consequence that where there is a mystery about a child's birth, slander spreads rumours which malice invents. A well-known writer, M. George Normandy, still maintains to this day and argues his case in the papers, that Guy de Maupassant was born at Fécamp in a house which he names and has depicted, and states that the reason the birth was kept secret and the child transferred at once to Miromesnil, just then rented by Monsieur de Maupassant, the husband, was that Madame Laure de Maupassant did not wish her son

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

to go forth into the world ticketed as having been born in a "town of fish-salters" and thought that it would be ever so much nicer and worthier of a de Maupassant to be registered and known as having been born in the Château de Miromesnil. George Normandy is most earnest in this belief, and when the other day he was invited down to Miromesnil to be present at the inauguration of the statue to Guy de Maupassant in the park there on September 6th, 1925, he telegraphed to the Minister, Monsieur de Monzie, to explain that the reason why he did not come was that Maupassant was not born at Miromesnil but at Fécamp.

One of Normandy's arguments is that seventy-five years ago registration of births was carelessly carried out in the French provinces and that accordingly the entry to be read in the registry of the Mairie at Tourville-sur-Arques cannot be considered documentary evidence of any value. This certificate of a "declaration of birth" is document No. 30 of the registry of "Etat-Civil" at the Mairie of Trouville-sur-Arques for the year 1850. It is signed by M. Lecoïnte, who was mayor of the commune in that year and who, according to M. Langlet, the present village schoolmaster and secretary to the mayor of Tourville, who is an ardent supporter of the birth at Miromesnil theory, was a most conscientious and careful official in matters of registration. This document, a facsimile of which is annexed, runs as follows, in translation :

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

No. 30—Birth of Henri-René-Albert-Guy de Maupassant, the  
5th of August, 1850.

### COMMUNE OF TOURVILLE-SUR-ARQUES.

Département of Seine-Inférieure

Arrondissement of Dieppe

Canton of Offranville.

Of the fifth day of the month of August, the year thousand eight hundred fifty, at six o'clock in the evening, certificate of a child which was presented before us and which was recognised to be of the male sex, born in this commune at the domicile of his father and mother, this day fifth August, one thousand eight hundred fifty at eight in the morning, son of Maupassant, Gustave-François-Albert, aged twenty-eight years, living on his income, and of Le Poittevin, Laure-Marie-Geneviève, aged twenty-eight years, living on her income, both residing at the château of Miromesnil, a section of this commune, married at Rouen, in this département, the ninth November one thousand eight hundred and forty-six. The which child received the names of Henri-René-Albert-Guy. On the demand made to us by the father of the child, in presence of Pierre Bimont, aged sixty-eight years, exercising the profession of tobacconist, living in this commune, as first witness, and of Isidore Latouque, aged forty-three years, exercising the profession of schoolmaster, also living in this commune, second witness. The declarer and the witnesses have signed, after reading over has been done, this certificate which has been drawn up in duplicate in their presence and passed as correct by us, Martin Lecointe, mayor of the above-named commune, exercising the functions of public officer of registration. Have signed: M. M. Gustave de Maupassant, Latouque, Bimont, A. Lecointe Martin.

This document, official though it be, by no means satisfies the partisans of the Fécamp theory, whose thesis, though now discredited, prevailed for many years, as may be seen from the numerous mentions in biographical notices, reference books, and under portraits of Guy de Maupassant, describing him as

Mairie de Jouvville sur Arques  
Canton d'Offranville.  
Arrondissement de Dieppe - Seine-Inférieure

Extrait du registre aux actes de l'Etat civil  
pour l'année 1850.

Acte n° 30.

Naissance de  
de Maupassant

Henri René  
Albert Guy

Du 5 août 1850.

Du cinquième jour du mois d'août, l'an  
mil huit cent cinquante à six heures du soir  
Acte de Naissance d'un enfant qui nous a été  
présenté et qui a été reconnu être du sexe  
masculin né en cette commune au domicile  
de ses père et mère ce jourd'hui cinq août  
mil huit cent cinquante à huit heures du  
matin fils de de Maupassant Gustave François  
Albert âgé de vingt-huit ans vivant de son revenu  
et de Le Pottevin Laure Marie Geneviève âgée de vingt  
huit ans vivant de son revenu tous deux demeurant au  
Château de Hornumail Section de cette commune  
Mariés à Paris de ce département le neuf novembre  
mil huit cent quarante trois. Lequel a reçu les  
prénoms de Henri René Albert Guy. Sur la  
réquisition et présentation à trois fois par le père  
de l'enfant en présence de Victor Bimont âgé de  
soixante huit ans faisant profession de Marchand  
de fabac demeurant en cette commune premier  
témoin et de Sidore Letouque âgé de quarante  
trois ans faisant profession d'Alimentaire demeurant  
aussi en cette commune. Second témoin. Le déclarant  
et les témoins ont signé après lecture faite le  
présent acte qui a été fait double en leur présence et  
contaté la loi par Noter Martin Lacroix Maire de la  
commune susdite remplissant les fonctions d'Officier  
public de l'Etat civil. Suivent les signatures  
Pour copie certifiée conforme au registre

Le 8 Octobre 1855 Le Maire (actuel)

L. Martin





## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

“born at Fécamp.” The doubt as to the real place of his birth was greatly enhanced by a blunder which figures in his certificate of decease, drawn up in Paris, where he is described as having been born at Sotteville-sur-Mer, a village between St.-Valery and Dieppe.

George Normandy goes so far as to say that there is no documentary evidence that the Maupassants were tenants of the Château de Miromesnil at the time of Guy's birth. There is no trace of any lease at the office of the successor of the notary who acted for the landlady in the 'forties and 'fifties, and no proof of any tenancy just at that time. The notary finds that at some “period anterior to 1848” the place was leased to the Maupassant family, but no details as to the date of this lease and the length of the tenancy are forthcoming. However, there is no doubt that Guy de Maupassant lived there with his parents as a baby, and that if he was not actually born there he was only a few hours old when he first came there. George Normandy lays particular stress on the fact that Madame de Maupassant refused the services of Madame Catherine, the midwife, who would have been an irrefutable witness to the birth, and suggests it was because the child had already been born elsewhere, when she was sent for to the château. The sending for her in haste, and her dismissal on account of her mean and indigent appearance, are described as ruses to deceive the public and facilitate the claim that the heir to the Maupassant family was born, not

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

in a small house in a small town redolent of salt fish, but in an historic mansion set in an historic demesne. There is an ugly English word, popularized by Thackeray, which afterwards was unjustly applied to Guy de Maupassant himself, which is suggested by certain acts and utterances of Madame Laure de Maupassant and which may have prompted the manœuvres which gave rise to this doubt as to Guy's birthplace, but that word shall not be written here. Guy de Maupassant loved and revered his mother, and as far as possible her memory shall be protected. In despite of George Normandy, his aged Fécamp witnesses and his not small band of followers, it is now officially and generally admitted that Guy *was* born at Miromesnil on the date mentioned and that the following passage from a letter written about his birth by Madame de Maupassant, as late as 1894, to Monsieur Gadeau de Kerville, who had wished his doubts to be set at rest, is the expression of the simple truth :

"Guy de Maupassant was born at the Château of Miromesnil on August 5th, 1850. The apartment which I then occupied is situated on the first floor as you turn to the right when you reach the landing by the great staircase . . . It was eight o'clock in the morning and the most radiant summer's sun seemed to bid welcome to him who was to die young . . . though not without some little glory."

The bedroom in this apartment was in one of the towers, the tower on the left of the back of the house, and is shown to guests of the Lebreton family, the

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

present owners of the Miromesnil estate, as the room where Guy de Maupassant was born.

The actual place of the unhappy writer's birth would be a detail of very slight importance had not the doubt concerning it given some sort of warranty to Guy de Maupassant's slanderers. He was amazingly successful; he leaped without any apparent (though there had been a strenuous) apprenticeship in letters to the very foremost place in French literature; he was known to be making what appeared to the French a very large income, to be amassing a large fortune as fortunes go in France; his triumphs in the lists of love were as notorious as they were numerous; he was a guest of the most exalted; he actually possessed a yacht and was forever cruising on summer seas; he was a constant traveller; one heard of him now in Italy, now in Africa, now in England as the guest of financial potentates; he was a man of bull-like strength, an athlete in many fields, a robust, good-looking gentleman with a gentleman's tastes and manners; he never spoke of literature, he was reserved though courteous towards strangers and kept himself aloof from literary coteries and journalistic assemblies. What more was needed to make him, amongst the writers, the best-hated man in Paris? The elder Goncourt, whose jealousy of his fellow-provincial (for E. de Goncourt was a Lorrain, as was Maupassant on his father's side) reeks in every line he wrote about him in his famous Journal. No doubt many of the lies that were current, during the decade of his

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

activity (1881-1891) and fame, about poor Guy had their source in Goncourt's *grenier*, whispered by lips churning with spite and envy. It is a fact that most Parisians in that decade believed Maupassant to be the illegitimate son of Flaubert, who by discreet lexicographers was described as his godfather here, or there as his uncle. That a vile insult was thus implied against Madame Laure de Maupassant was no check to his traducers, though for these there may have been the excuse that they ignored that lady's very existence. Her name never figured in the papers; her life was secluded and full of dignity. It is doubtful whether one journalist out of a hundred in Paris in the 'eighties knew that there existed a Madame Laure de Maupassant, that she was Guy de Maupassant's mother and had contributed in some measure to his success as a storyteller. Those who knew her would shrug their shoulders at the sorry slanders. There lives to-day in Dieppe, where with her daughter she keeps a concierge's lodge in the rue Toustain, an old lady of 77, a Madame François, who knew the Maupassants well at Etretat and was Guy's playmate till he was thirteen years of age, who recently, referring to these slanders, shrugged her bent shoulders and said: "What don't they invent, *les méchants!* Flaubert? Allow me to laugh! Madame Laure was too proud, far too much the grande dame, ever to have weakened."

Yes, *les méchants!* In Paris, as in Berlin and as in London, the average poverty of the writing people

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

engenders that *Brodneid* which prompts their enmity against those who are successful and by consequence in the receipt of large earnings. The reptilism to which Bismarck referred, and which is as evident on the boulevards or in the purlicus of Fleet Street as ever it was on Unter den Linden, is bred of this poverty and this anxiety about existence, and envy results which voices itself in slander. Few people have been worse or more persistently slandered than was Guy de Maupassant, who, however, stood with regard to his traducers on a Mount Everest of contempt; another reason for their hatred.

It was natural enough that Madame de Maupassant should like her child to be born at Miromesnil Castle. She had the presentiment that he—she was certain it was to be a son—would be a somebody. *That* she knew from what she felt seething within her brain, as also from her remembrance of the rare gifts of her late brother Alfred. She felt that this son would be one whose biography would come to be written, and she liked to think that it would be recorded of him that he was born in this beautiful and historic place. In which respect she differed in nowise from every woman on this earth who has Lucina to invoke.

The château, as it is to-day, is much larger than when in 1850 Gustave de Maupassant rented it. Large additions and embellishments have been added by the present proprietor, Monsieur André Lebreton. The mansion dates from the days of the Regency, as one recognizes from the lofty windows, the garret

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

*lucarnes* architecturally adorned, the gable roofs, the ornamental vases, the balustrades. The very plumbing with the leaden *épis* rising from the attics speaks of an age when everything was turned into decoration. In front of the house, separating it from the park, is a mimic moat bridged over from the avenue on to the cour d'honneur, now a garden, a suggestion of feudality and heroic ages. Leading up to this entrance is a long avenue of lofty century-old trees with woods on either side. On the right about a hundred yards from the château is a little chapel which served the seigneurs of Miromesnil for their devotions and saved them from contact with the *manants* and *croquants*, the Madame Catherines of Tourville-sur-Arques when at worship. Hugues Leroux, the late senator, speaks of this mansion as "one of those châteaux which are lashed by the winds from the open sea, where the equinoctial gales carry off pell-mell with the leaves from the beech groves, the tiles of the roof."

Although the sea cannot actually be viewed from the grounds, there is the smell of it in the air, and the sounds of it are at all times audible. It is here that Maupassant placed the scene of *Une Vie*, though the château of the parents of Jeanne Le Perthuis des Vauds, Les Peuples near Yport, as described in that book, has little resemblance with the château de Miromesnil.

The estate had been a feudal demesne as early as the twelfth century. According to George Dubosc, most erudite and industrious of writers on Normandy

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

in general and on Maupassant and other Norman celebrities in particular, in the fifteenth century it was the property of Jean Leroux, who was cupbearer to Louis XI, from whom it passed to the sister-in-law of Thomas Basin, who was one of those who most actively pursued the rehabilitation of Joan of Arc. Eventually it came into the hands of the Hue de la Roque family, from which came the famous lawyer who took his name from this estate, Armand Thomas Hue de Miromesnil. This was the great Chancellor, who, having defied Maupe ou under Louis XV when a member of the Parliament of Rouen, fell into disgrace with his brother magistrates, but was recalled to office and honours by Louis XVI, after the ridiculous Parlement Maupe ou had been laughed out of existence. Miromesnil became Chancellor in Maupe ou's place, and in this capacity assisted the kind-hearted king in drafting and promulgating the Edict by which torture was abolished in France. When the Revolution broke out he retired to Miromesnil and lived there in peace and undisturbed by the Reds or the Terror, until his death in 1796. That he died peacefully in his bed, at the age of seventy-three, although an aristocrat, a former magistrate and the friend and confidant of Louis Capet, is the best testimony of the high esteem in which he was held, for the Terrorists were in great force in that part of Normandy and Tourville-sur-Arques rang nightly with the carmagnole. The parish church had been turned into stables, and the font in which fifty-six



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

years later a little boy was to be christened Henri René Albert Guy de Maupassant was being used by some local Marat as a kennel for his dog.

In his walks about his park and in the woods to the right and left of the big avenue leading up to his mansion, Hue de Miromesnil would ponder on his life's work and perhaps wonder how Maupéou had felt when the king and he had done away with torture. It must have vexed the bad chancellor living in disgrace at Thuit, for he was a sanguinary man. It was he who conducted the trial of the wretched Damiens; it was he who, with two equally blood-thirsty colleagues, presided over the hideous supplicium, that *supplice de Damiens* which undoubtedly hastened on the outbreak of the Revolution. Is it not recorded of him that when the very hangman, appalled by the cries of the tortured man, when several relays of sturdy Percherons had failed to drag him limb from limb, Damiens being a truculent, well-muscled man, appealed to presiding Maupéou to be allowed to sever the tendons and so put a speedy finish to the unspeakable torments which had already lasted two hours, he shook his head and bade Monsieur de Paris carry out the sentence as ordained by the Court? It was without doubt this hideous execution which prompted the reform which stands to the credit of poor, kindly Louis and of Miromesnil, his chancellor, and certainly Maupéou would know this and resent it. *Manants*, he considered, were made for the rack, the boot, the question by water.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

Louis and Armand Hue abolished torture as inflicted upon man by man, but, alas ! neither king nor chancellor has the power to prevent men from torturing themselves, and it is fortunate that the kind-hearted Armand could not foresee that a few decades later there would be born in his mansion a gifted boy who deliberately and wilfully would torture himself, to the ruin of a fine physique, the unhinging of a splendid brain, and close a career of unusual brilliancy and success in a madhouse and premature death. This was the tragedy of Maupassant's whole life, and when Hippolyte Taine, after listening to his reading of his story: *Le Champ des Oliviers*, exclaimed with an enthusiasm rare to him: "It is Aeschylus!", those who heard him, knowing of Maupassant's life, may well have wondered if the historian and philosopher referred to the man's work or to that *eirôneia* by which a man endowed with every gift and circumstance that make for human happiness kept himself in a Gehenna of mental suffering and torturing apprehension.

## CHAPTER IV

Why Guy's Head Was Round—Dr. Guiton's Man-Handling—  
Guy's Baptism—His Parents—His Christening—The Font  
that Was a Dog-Kennel—A Line of Long Descent—  
Gentilhomme de Lettres—The Right to a Marquisate—  
Goncourt's Sneer—The Maupassant Coat-of-Arms—His  
Name—Was Maupassant Norman?

**T**HE writers who have triumphantly vindicated the right of Miromesnil to claim to be the birthplace of Guy de Maupassant oppose to the argument that the dismissal, before the *accouchement*, of the local midwife is a suspicious circumstance, the statement that Dieppe doctors (why doctors? asks the irreconcilable George Normandy) hastily summoned, attended the lady and safely delivered her. These practitioners have, of course, long since gone to where even the ablest doctors go and their testimony cannot be invoked. Maupassant, however, himself frequently spoke, when alluding to the shape of his head, of an old country doctor, Dr Guiton, who helped to bring both him and, six years later, his brother Hervé into the world. His valet relatès how one evening when he had handed his master his opera-hat, Maupassant turned it round and round and said: "It's shabby and out of fashion. I shall have to order a new one to be made for me, for, with the exception of soft hats, I have to have all mine made to measure. My head is so round that I can never find a hat to fit me. This perfectly round head of mine, which is the

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

same as my brother Hervé's,\* results, according to what my mother has told me, from the fact that the old doctor who ushered us into the world took us at once between his knees and started massaging and moulding our heads most vigorously, finishing up with the gesture of the potter who with a turn of his thumb rounds off a vessel of clay. Whereupon he said to our mother: 'See, Madame, I have made him a head as round as an apple, and this, you may rest assured, will give him later a very active brain, and almost certainly an intelligence of the first order.' He did the same thing to poor Hervé, but whether it was that the lapse of six years between the dates of our births had enfeebled the doctor's hands, or that he was that day in less good form, he couldn't mould my poor brother's head into the shape he wished to give it. The little head kept slipping out of his fingers and he was so vexed that he gave vent to a real Norman oath. I sometimes ask myself if it was this massage of my infant brain by the good old doctor, kneading it in a certain manner, that enables me to-day to do an amount of work much above the average."

In narrating this anecdote, Guy de Maupassant was doubtless making fun of the worthy François, for even the most ignorant and prejudiced country doctor would hardly attempt such manhandling of a newborn baby's skull, and was enacting in his vivid imagination the scene round Gervaise's bed just after the birth of Nana in Zola's book, *L'Assommoir*, which,

\* Maupassant contradicts this lower down.

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

although he poorly requited its author for his real sympathy and unfeigned admiration for him, had made a deep and lasting impression upon him, as is shown by the fact that perhaps the only story of Maupassant's which appears to be inspired by another writer's works, *Le Papa de Simon*, seems in its main character and one romantic incident to be taken from this masterpiece of Zola's.\* The fact, however, that Maupassant spoke freely of his birth to his servant seems to show that he, at least, knew of no reason why any secrecy should be maintained, or mystery made about the event.

There exist doubt and contradiction as to the length of time that the Maupassants lived at Miromesnil. By some it is said that the place was only taken on a six month's agreement—possibly with a view to the birth of the heir—by others that Guy spent three or four years of his earliest youth there. The more acceptable story is that the Maupassants resided at this château for eighteen months and that Madame de Maupassant terminated her tenancy on the ground that the cawing of the innumerable rooks in the big trees of the park was perfectly intolerable to a woman afflicted with nerves as she was. It is more probable that the real reason why Guy's parents moved to a less aristocratic address and a cheaper rent was that they really had not the means to afford residence at such an expensive place. The incomes referred to in

\* Compare Goujet, the blacksmith, and the blacksmith in this tale, and how each makes his hammer, as he plies it, reveal his love.



CHÂTEAU DE MIROMESNIL AT THE TIME OF GUY'S BIRTH THERE IN 1850  
(By courtesy of M. Henri Defontaine)



VIEW OF CHÂTEAU DE MIROMESNIL, AS IT IS TO-DAY  
(Photo by E. Pireaux)



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

the birth certificate as being the means of existence of Monsieur and Madame de Maupassant were moderate in the extreme. Madame de Maupassant, who is frequently described as "very rich," was in the enjoyment of 5000 francs a year, anglicé: £200, while Gustave de Maupassant received from his father, Jules de Maupassant, the Rouen agent of the Government tobacco monopoly, in guise of dowry, an allowance of 4000 francs, or £160 a year. This dowry allowance disappeared in 1868 on the bankruptcy of his father, and the Lothario Gustave had to go to work as clerk in a Parisian stockbroker's office, where, by dint of extreme economy, living, as he records, on £40 a year a life of privations, he managed to reconstitute a capital from which, in his old age on the Riviera, he derived an income equal to the dowry allowance he had lost a quarter of a century previously. Certainly an income of £360 a year represented under the Second Republic in France a comfortable revenue, with a purchasing power about four times what it is in England to-day, but it was not one which warranted young married people, with a family coming, in renting seigniorial demesnes. The early removal therefore to more modest quarters at Etretat was reasonable. Writers, however, maintain that Guy's early youth was spent here, and it is stated that not so very long ago there were very old people at Tourville and Miromesnil who well remembered the sturdy little fellow, who, when asked his name, used to run his appellations together and reply: "Guyde-



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

maupassant is my name.” As to this name—the beauty and poetry of which may have helped him in the early days of his bid for public attention—there are examples in England how a striking name may help a mediocrity to reputation—its singular appropriateness may be noted. “J’ai nom : ‘mauvais passant’” (My name is the evil passer-by) he used to say to his friends. *Mau* is mediaeval French for *mauvais* and frequently occurs as a prefix to family names; Maupas is a common name in Normandy, there are Maulevrier, Mauclerc, Maucroix, Maugras, Maubant, Maurepas, Maupertuis, and there is Mau-péou made notorious as the enemy of Miromesnil. In connection with whom it may be noted as a coincidence that in the biographical dictionaries Maupassant’s name is followed by that of the torturing chancellor. A bad passer-by or through! Did ever a man make a worse passage through life than this poor Henri, René Albert Guy, bad in the sense of deriving nothing but black misery and despair from every lavish gift bestowed upon him by nature and success?

The name is a very uncommon one. It is recorded that having one day rowed from Paris to Rouen, as he often did, he sent a friend to moor his boat at a boatman’s on one of the islands, and that the skiff was duly entered as belonging to M. Guillemot, who was en passage, thus “M. Guillemot, passant.”

Possibly from an innate contempt for the profession of letters, possibly from a high opinion of the aristocratic ring of his family name, possibly because

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

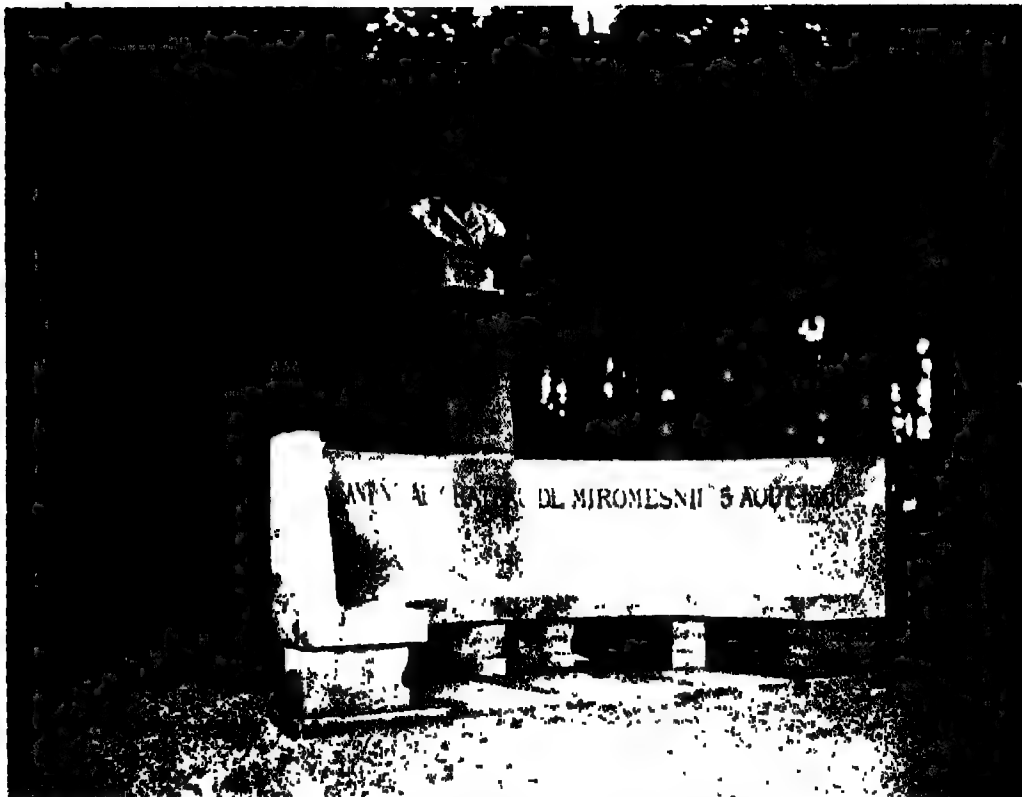
he wished to reserve his true signature for the chef d'oeuvre which he knew he would one day produce, it was not as Guy de Maupassant that his earliest writings were published. It was with the pseudonym "Joseph Prunier" that his first story, the sketch from which the fine story of the severed hand, kept chained to the wall by an Englishman in Corsica, which one night gets loose and strangles the man who had mutilated its owner, published under the title "La Main Ecorchée" in 1875 in the *Almanach Lorrain de Pont-à-Mousson*, was signed. Much of his earlier work appeared over this name, while occasionally he used for his journalistic efforts the nom-de-plume of Guy de Valmont, from a locality with which he was familiar. For stories of the erotic nature which was desired and exacted by the publishers and readers of *Gil Blas*, he used the pseudonym of "Maufrigneuse," while signing his real name to other work appearing in the same journal, *Bel-Ami* for instance.

There was every reason for him to be proud of his name. When Edmond de Goncourt sneered at him, saying that the only book to be seen on Guy de Maupassant's drawing-room table was a copy of the *Almanach de Gotha*, it is to be regretted that there was nobody there to tell Monsieur de Goncourt that such a reference book was quite in its proper place in the house of a man of Maupassant's descent. The sneer was all the less kindly on the part of the older man that, like Maupassant, he was of Lorrain extraction and nobility. True, the Maupassants did start

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

from the middle-class, the *roture*, the bourgeoisie, but that was in the sixteenth century. In 1586 one hears of a Robert de Maupassant, established as an iron-master at Aubréville, near Verdun, having moved there from Ligny-en-Barrois, near Vaucouleurs, in the land of Joan of Arc.\* At Châlons there was, about that time, a certain Jacques de Maupassant, a draper, or master weaver. His son Claude moved up a step. He is a "merchant-apothecary" and marries Louisa Roget, the daughter of Pierre Roget, described on the marriage certificate as having been "a respectable man." When Claude de Maupassant marries again, in 1638, a number of notabilities, including the Bailly du Chapitre de Châlons, sit down to the marriage feast. The Maupassants have by now acquired real estate. A deed of sale exists by which Christopher Maupassant conveys to one Jean Humbert, a vine-grower, a small house at Verdun. Another Claude de Maupassant, who, M. Dubosc thinks, may have been the son of the apothecary, distinguishes himself in the tented field and is the first of the family to follow the profession of arms. He figures as an engineer at the siege of Candia in 1669. This was one of the operations of the Duc Royannez de la Feuillade, who with three hundred French noblemen went, as Dubosc puts it, "on the last French crusade," to help the Venetians of Morosini in their defence of Crete against the Turks. Claude de Maupassant

\* For this account of the Maupassant family acknowledgement must be made to the study by George Dubosc in his admirable book: *Trois Normands*.



MAUPASSANT MEMORIAL IN THE PARK OF THE CHÂTEAU



VIEW OF TOURVILLE SUR-ARQUES  
(Photos by E. Pucaux.)



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

afterwards became a cavalry officer, and died in 1700 at Loisy-en-Brie, where his regiment was garrisoned. It seems that this was the first Maupassant to adopt the style of "sieur de," which means the first to rank with the nobility. His two marriages show that he was considered as one of their rank by the noble families with whom he allied himself. His first bride was a Mademoiselle Antoinette de Beaurepaire; the second, Louise-Antoinette de Sacquespée. He had a son and a daughter by his first wife, Claude Maupassant, sieur de Coizard, who was a lieutenant in the Saint Louis cavalry regiment, a crack corps; he also married a lady of noble birth, Jeanne Françoise Senée d'Arcolan, and had several children. There was another Claude de Maupassant of this generation, the son of the Madame Antoinette de Sacquespée, lady of Joyeuse, wife of the elder Claude de Maupassant, who was also a soldier and of whom it is recorded that "he was an amiable man but did not pay his debts." He died suddenly at an inn in the Brie district, and a large sum of money in his possession, being the regimental funds for paying his company, was handed over by his body-servant to his half-brother, Claude. The latter appears to have substituted himself for the other Claude and to have claimed the inheritance of the Sacquespées. An interesting and protracted lawsuit resulted, which at least gave great prominence to the name of Maupassant. There were numerous Maupassants who distinguished themselves in the eighteenth century:

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

Claude-Etienne de Maupassant de Wardancher, who was Procurator General to the King in the Supreme Council of Corsica. There was a Maupassant who wrote the life of Anna of Austria, at whose court he had lived, as he informs the Prince de Condé in a letter which is still extant. There was Jacques de Maupassant, King's Councillor and assessor to the Hôtel de Ville at Saumur, and there was Jean Baptiste Maupassant, who received a patent of nobility from the Emperor of Austria, dated May 3, 1752. By right of this patent, or by others, the branch of the Maupassant family from which Guy descended were marquises, and when M. de Goncourt sneered at Guy de Maupassant and noted in his diary that he understood he was getting himself called Monsieur le Comte, he was either telling a deliberate lie, or was in ignorance of the fact that Maupassant, while he knew that his father, Gustave, might, if he chose, call himself Marquis de Maupassant, which, as he was living on £40 a year as a bank clerk, he was very unlikely to do, held the opinion and had made it public that the son of a marquis has no right to call himself count.

In his fine story: *Le Loup* in the *Claire de Lune* collection, which no doubt Goncourt had read—it was published in book form in 1884—Maupassant introducing his characters writes:

“ They were styled in the country M. le Marquis and M. le Cadet, as the noblemen of those days did not act as the rubbishy nobility of the present time acts, and establish a descending hierarchy in titles; for the son of a marquis is no

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

more a count, nor the son of a viscount a baron, than the son of a general is a colonel by birth. But the mean snobbishness of the present day finds an advantage in this arrangement."

So that the very last title that Maupassant would have assumed would have been that of Count, and, of course, as long as his father lived he could not style himself (had he wished to do so) Marquis de Maupassant. As a matter of fact, various flatterers, mainly female, frequently referred to him by this title, but he appears to have for the style of Marquis the same contempt that existed in France at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when Regnard had ridiculed it with his : " Allons, saute, Marquis ! " in the comedy, *Le Joueur*. Indeed the word " marquis " became, as the French lexicons record, synonymous for a man aping the manners of a grand seigneur. It was on account of this disrepute into which the title had fallen that Napoleon in his creations of a new nobility never granted the title of marquis. This indeed was restored by Louis XVIII, but it never recovered any degree of public respect. Guy de Maupassant's signet ring bore his coat-of-arms, on which figures a marquis's coronet, but personally he never made any use of this designation. It appears, however, that his valet, François, when he was with his master at Cannes, where titles were as common as blackberries and to be untitled was to be non-existent from the social point of view, used to refer to callers to " Monsieur le Marquis." It was from this that perhaps Goncourt argued when he tried to brand Maupassant



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

as a snob. The sneer would delight the jealous writing fraternity in Paris, authors and journalists, who, hating Maupassant for his success, resented the fact that he was of gentle birth. The same sort of thing was witnessed in England when the reviewers fell so foul of Lord Byron's first volume of poems. This had been predicted by Wordsworth, who remarked that the volume contained many beauties, but that it would get a bad reception because the poet was also a lord. Which, repeated to Byron many years later, evoked from him, with reference to the poet whom he had so mercilessly lashed, a sorrowful: "Had I only known!"

The Maupassant coat-of-arms is an elaborate one and its description in heraldry is as follows :

*D'azur à la fasce d'argent chargée d'une main de gueules, couchée, fermant le poing, accompagnée de deux étoiles du même; la dite fasce, accompagnée en chef, de sept annelets d'argent, 3 & 4, en pointe d'une ancre d'argent.*

A Maupassant was a notary in Paris in the eighteenth century. He had two sons, who held positions under the Minister of Finance. One of them took the additional name of "de Valmont," and his name seems to have been given to the eldest son generation after generation. In a Maupassant housekeeping book there occur such entries as : "Paid for Valmont's coat and waistcoat" and so on. There is a place called Valmont in Normandy. Guy de Maupassant used the name of "Guy de Valmont" as a signature to his earlier writings.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

It was with one of Guy's direct ancestors that the Lorrain Maupassants became connected with Normandy, which was to be so closely associated with his life and work. This was Louis de Maupassant, who was at the court of Louis XVIII and was present at that gluttonous monarch's death. Louis often used to relate how funny the former Comte de Provence looked on his death-bed, with a grotesque nightcap on his bloated head. This Louis was married for the first time to a Miss Murray, a creole in Mauritius. It was from his brother, Julius, that Guy descended, and therefore the suggestion that he had inherited Scotch blood and Scotch prudence from a maternal ancestress is as misleading as many of the stories told about him. It was Julius, the brother-in-law of the Scotch Maupassant, who was Guy's grandfather. The Creole bride brought great wealth to her husband, and he was thus able to provide for the education and settlement of his brothers. Pierre-Jules de Maupassant was born in Paris, rue des Blancs-Manteaux. He started in life as an employé of the Ministry of Finance. His wife was a Mademoiselle Pluchart, who was a daughter of the tax-collector at Bernay. She was a beautiful woman, with fat cheeks and smiling eyes, and she wore her hair cut short in to-day's foolish fashion, ridiculed and condemned more, than two centuries ago by Madame de Sevigné.

Portraits of her are extant, a water-colour by Leblan depicting her with her two children, Gustave (afterwards Guy's father) and Louise, and an oil

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

painting by Renouard. The building in the background of this picture also appears in the portrait of Guy's father, as a man, which was by Bellangé and hangs in the Museum at Rouen. This building is part of the big house at Neuville-Champ-d'Oisel, near Rouen, which Jules de Maupassant used as a country house, his Rouen residence being in the rue Beauvoisine at number 26, where later Guy de Maupassant was a frequent visitor to his grandfather. At Neuville, Jules de Maupassant, whose profession was that of agent for the Government tobacco factories, had created a vast agricultural enterprise, which seems to have come to utter grief, swallowing up Gustave de Maupassant's dowry allowance. He is described as having been a good and kindly man—which perhaps accounts for his business failure—without the least aristocratic pretensions.\* He died in 1875 at a house in the rue Jacques-le-Lieur. This house had formerly been the business premises of the Cord'homme family and came into Jules de Maupassant's hands after his daughter had taken Charles Cord'homme for her second husband. This Charles Cord'homme is the original from whom Guy de Maupassant drew Cornudet, the demagogue, who tries to make love to Boule de Suif at the inn and eats hard-boiled eggs and sings the Marseillaise while Boule de Suif is famishing and cries, as the

\* He is amiably portrayed by his grandson in his novel *Une Vie* as the Baron Le Pertuis des Vauds, the kind father of the unhappy Jeanne, who has horticultural ambitions.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

diligence proceeds on its way after the wretched girl's sacrifice.

Madame Charles Cord'homme's first husband had been Alfred Le Poittevin, of an excellent middle-class Rouen family. This was the man to whom Gustave Flaubert dedicated his *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, an *âme d'élite*, who had the greatest influence on Gustave Flaubert and who superintended the education of his sister, Laure de Poittevin. He died before his genius had found any great expression. Laure de Poittevin married Gustave de Maupassant, the brother of Alfred's wife, Louise de Maupassant. Lorrain accordingly on his father's side, Guy de Maupassant derived from his mother the blood of the denizens of the province of Poitou, of which Poitiers is the capital, the Poitevins. Of Norman blood there seems but a tinge in his composition, but with his native air he absorbed the Norman characteristics. In many respects he was a Norman amongst Normans. These proudly claim him as one of them. His most frequent description to-day is *le conteur normand*, the Norman story-teller.

He himself, however, nowhere emphatically claims kinship with the provincials, whose foibles and vices he ruthlessly exposed and scourged. When an opportunity was once afforded him to proclaim, had he been so inclined, his blood relationship with the people amongst whom he was born—that is to say, when the late Monsieur Carolus d'Harrans wrote, in June, 1889, to ask him to become a contributor, as a Norman, to

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

a Norman review he was founding: *La Plage Normande*—he answered with his usual kindness but without enthusiasm as follows:

“I very gladly authorize you to put my name down as one of the contributors to *La Plage Normande*, but I can’t absolutely promise to give you what is called “copy.” It’s just so as not to hear speak of this same “copy,” which has become the nightmare of my life, that I have been obliged to make up my mind and buy a boat and live in it. I am on board now and I shall be afloat all the summer, abandoning for good *La Guillette* and the Norman seaside resorts, where I find neither the sun nor the repose that I love beyond everything.

“It may happen, however, that some evening, becalmed in some little Spanish or Algerian port, I might write some lines for you and send you this remembrance for the shore on which I was born and which I love well, chilly as it is.”

Maupassant, who hated “talking shop” with literary people and interviewers, was always most courteous in replying on literary matters to those who had not been prompted by curiosity or the hope for gain to approach him. Such letters were never left unanswered and hundreds of his autograph notes are treasured the world over by strangers who had written to him and whom he had answered, often with wit always with courtesy and a wish to oblige. In this respect Maupassant differed from most successful writers, but then Maupassant was a gentleman of letters.



PORTRAIT OF LAURE DE MAUPASSANT, GUY'S MOTHER, WITH LITTLE SIMONE,  
GUY'S NIECE AND HEIRESS.



## CHAPTER V

Madame François, of Dieppe—One of Guy's Playmates—  
Describes Madame de Maupassant—A Portrayal of Guy's  
Father—Who Was Maupassant's Double?—A Mater  
Dolorosa—The Separation of Guy's Parents—On The  
Essentiality of Pascal—The Res Angusta Domi—Guy's  
Baptism and Christening.

“**T**HE mother, Laure de Maupassant, was *un peu exaltée*”—(slightly off her mental balance)—“I often used to see her in her garden at Etretat, at four o'clock in the morning, striding up and down, reciting poetry, Shakespeare and what not. But in her appearance she showed no sign of eccentricity; she was always dressed fashionably.”

Thus, Madame François, who was fifteen when Guy left Etretat for school and who for years was the boy's playmate.

Laure's marriage to Gustave de Maupassant in Rouen on November 9th, 1846, was a love-match. He was less wealthy than she, having only an allowance of £160 a year from his father by way of dowry, while she had a *dot* of over 100,000 francs. On the other hand he was of aristocratic descent, and the Rouen middle-classes have always liked to ally themselves with the gentry. Her brother, Alfred, married Louise de Maupassant, Gustave's sister, in the same year.

At the time of his marriage, Gustave was doing nothing. He was, as Guy's birth certificate states,



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

“living on his revenues.” When Jules de Maupassant’s affairs went wrong and Gustave’s income stopped, he sought and got a berth as a clerk to a stockbroker in Paris. Long before then, however, he had separated from his wife. He was a rural Don Juan, and in Julien de Lamare, the unfaithful husband in *Une Vie*, the scene of which is laid at the Château de Miromesnil, Guy de Maupassant had limned his father, physically as follows :

“He possessed one of those happy faces of which women dream and which are displeasing to men, to all men. His dark and curly hair shaded his smooth forehead, browned by the open-air; and two eyebrows as regular, as though they were artificial, rendered deep and tender his dark eyes, the whites of which seemed slightly tinged with blue.

“His long, thick eyelashes gave to his look that passionate eloquence which disturbs the haughty and beautiful lady in drawing-rooms, and causes the lass in a cap who is carrying a basket through the streets to turn round.

“The langorous charm of this look suggested great depth of thought and lent to even his slightest remarks a certain importance.”

For the meanness of Julien in money-matters, Guy de Maupassant had a model in his father. We find him, after the writer’s miserable death, haggling over his share of his inheritance. He claims a pair of binoculars: he asks “What about the barometer?” After he separated from his wife, in 1861 or thereabouts, all he could do for his sons was to make her an allowance of 1600 francs a year (£64), which stopped a few years later when his own income disappeared in his father’s failure. His infidelities were

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

as open and notorious as those of Julien de Lamare in *Une Vie*. There is every reason to believe that the story of Julien's *amour* with the servant maid at the château, whose room he sought out the very night that he returned with his bride from their honeymoon, and who became a mother by him, was a version of one of Gustave de Maupassant's intrigues and its consequences. It will be remembered that the maid in the story gives birth to a boy, who is thus half-brother to Jeanne's own son, Paul de Lamare, and that in order to settle her Jeanne's parents procure a neighbouring peasant to marry her and assume the paternity of the love-child. This is a not uncommon arrangement in Normandy, and the only comment that people make when a man marries a girl who has an illegitimate child and thus legitimizes it, is the remark in patois: "*Il a pris la vache avec le viau*" ("He has taken the cow with the calf"). In 1916 there died in Rouen, where he occupied the post of watchman at the Auction Sales rooms, a certain Henri Lecuyer, who was about the same age as Guy de Maupassant would have been had he lived till then. This Henri was born at Miromesnil and was the wife of a labourer on the estate. His physical resemblance to Guy de Maupassant was extraordinary. This was first noticed after the erection of the statue to Maupassant after his death in the gardens of the Museum, the Jardin Solférino as they are called. Henri Lecuyer was then acting as keeper of this garden, and one day as he was standing near Maupassant's statue

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

a Parisian journalist noticed how like the man was to the statue. He engaged him in conversation and learned from him that he was born at the same place and at about the same time as the writer. He added that he was Maupassant's foster-brother, that his mother had suckled the great man as a baby. This story spread like wildfire over Paris, and it was quoted as further proof of the truth of the foul slander to which allusion has already been made as to Guy's real paternity. His mother, then living in solitary sorrow on the Riviera, weeping for her lost children, was approached on the subject and questioned on the story, though only the suggestion that Henri Lecuyer had been Guy's foster-brother was put to her. She indignantly denied that Madame Lecuyer could claim to be Guy's foster-mother in any way. "I, I, I alone," she said, "gave breast to my sons. Guy had no *frère de lait*. Once only and for not more than four or five days, Madame Lecuyer, who was then nursing this son, Henri, of hers, was called into the château to nurse Guy. I was laid up with an attack of cholera nostras and could not give him my breast. Madame Lecuyer only nursed him for at most five days."\* Henri's extraordinary resemblance to Guy, was not alluded to in the interview, or if it was no mention of this fact transpired. Madame de Maupassant seemed to have as much repugnance for the Lecuyers as she

\* It may be noted that the name of Julien de Lamare's illegitimate son by the servant-girl in *Une Vie* is Denis Lecoq. Maupassant had no skill in inventing names for his characters and it looks as though he had had the name Lecuyer—that of his Rouen double—in his mind when he gave the name of Lecoq to Rosalie and her offspring.



FAMILY GROUP OF MAUPASSANT FAMILY, GIVING PORTRAITS OF GUY, HIS GRANDFATHER, OF HIS UNCLE CORD'HOMME (THE CORNUDET OF "BOULE DE SUIF"), AND OF HIS MOTHER. (Note.--GUY STANDS SECOND TO THE LEFT IN THE LAST ROW. JULES DE MAUPASSANT IS THE GENTLEMAN SEATED WITH HIS HAT ON. CORD'HOMME (CORNUDET) IS NINTH FROM LEFT IN LAST ROW, WITH STRAW HAT. MADAME DE MAUPASSANT IS THE LADY SEATED ON THE EXTREME RIGHT, ON CHAIR.)

(By courtesy of M. Henri Defontaine.)



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

had shown for Madame Catherine of the same village. She had a decided, pre-Revolution contempt for the *manant* and *croquant* class.

Yet all who knew Laure de Maupassant loved and honoured her. Guy adored her from his earliest childhood to the very last hour of his rational life. His letters to her breathe respect and affection. This is the way he concludes a letter written on Ministry paper from the Ministry of Marine in 1877. It is the letter in which he suggests that the real cause of all her nervous troubles is tape-worm, which he thinks she may have passed on to his brother Hervé. It is a somewhat priggish letter, the only bit of Maupassant's writing that indicates this quality. It is notable also for the fact that he mentions that his medical suggestions come from a certain Doctor Duplay, whom he had met at the house of an actress called Suzanne Lagier, who was notoriously on intimate terms with him at that time. This letter ends :

"Good-bye, my truly dear mother. I embrace thee with all my force and with all my heart. Many kind things to Cramoisan and the maids, Thy son, Guy de Maupassant."

His letters to his mother he usually signed with his name in full, while to friends he was often "Guy," or "Maupassant," or "Guy de M<sup>t</sup>". The name was a glorious one, of cosmopolitan reputation. His mother to whom he owed so much should be reminded of the fame to which she had led him.

This mater dolorosa to whom fate was cruel, de-

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

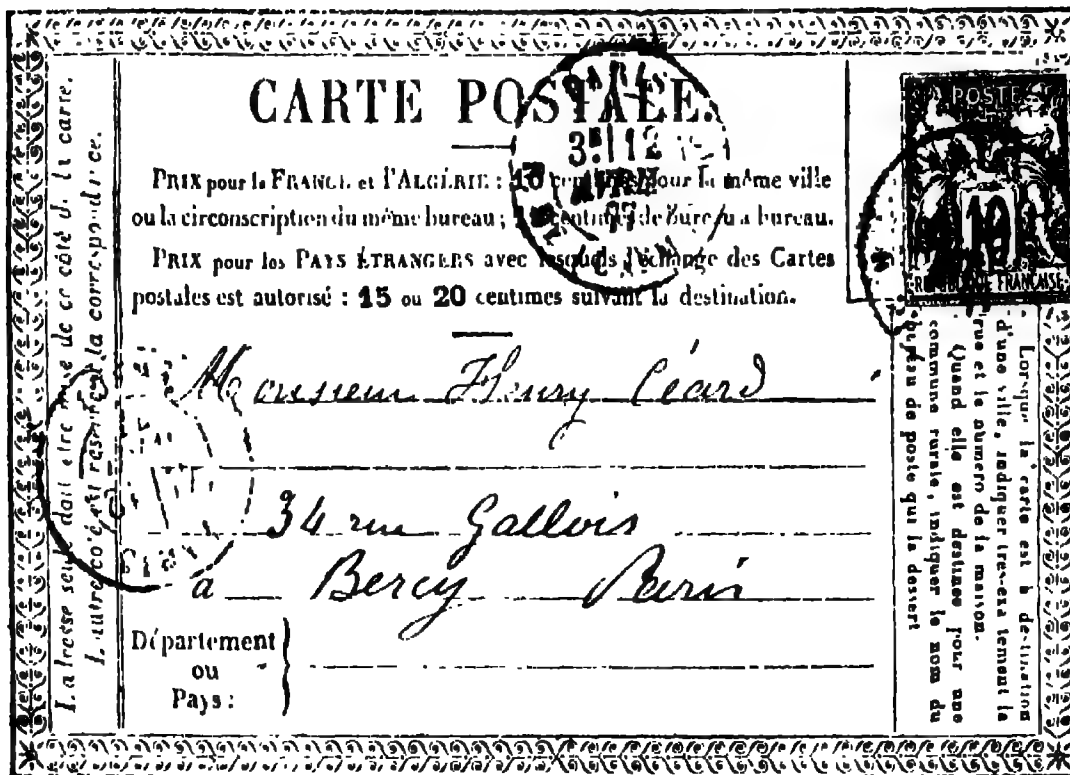
rived the only consolation of her old age, when blindness came upon her, from her remembrance of her son and in conversations about him. She always spoke of him as "Monsieur Guy." When she saw her death approaching she left directions that her gravestone was to bear no other inscription than her name, the dates of her birth and of her demise, and the fact that she was the mother of Guy and Hervé de Maupassant.

The doctor who attended her, as a friend, at Nice, related after her death that he had visited her daily for eighteen years and that no words of his could express his high regard and respect for her.

The little girl who to-day is old Madame François, and lives at Dieppe, says she was "*une femme très, très instruite.*"

She claimed to have decided from the very beginning that Guy was to be an author. She said that this decision was arrived at by deduction. The boy reminded her so much of her brother Alfred, whom both she and Gustave Flaubert considered a genius cut off before its fruitage, that she could come to no other conclusion than that he must have a great message to deliver to the world. Guy's own version of how he came to be a writer differs in toto from his mother's. As to the latter, the Latin saying: *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc* suggests itself.

Her life with her husband was not a happy one. Details have not transpired. Like her son, Guy, Madame de Maupassant, as Hugues Leroux writing



Je reçois une lettre de Zola qui n'est plus  
libre vendredi à cause de la fête du Palais Royal  
et qui demande de remettre le dîner à un autre  
jour.  
J'ai vu immédiatement Flaubert qui propose  
lundi prochain. J'ai écrit tout de suite à  
Goncourt et à Champfleury pour les prévenir.  
Donc, à moins d'empêchement absolu de  
l'un d'eux, auquel cas je vous préviendrai, à  
lundi 7 heures chez Vap.  
à vous  
Suzanne

POSTCARD TO HENRI CÉARD SIGNED "DE MT."





## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

of the son puts it, "in a supreme degree observed that precept of wisdom : Hide thy life." One wonders if scenes witnessed in early youth, scenes between his father and mother, may not have suggested to Maupassant such stories as "*Garçon, Un Bock*."

The direct reason why Madame de Maupassant separated from her husband never transpired. Madame François, who has already been quoted, relates that it came about because Monsieur de Maupassant actually brought one of his mistresses to Etretat while his wife was living there. But Madame de Maupassant had suffered worse than this at her husband's hands. There is a letter in existence written to her by her son Guy, when he was only nine years old, from which it appears that Gustave de Maupassant used to let his son go out with his mistress and that the precocious lad had guessed what was the relationship between the lady and his father.

"I was first in composition," he wrote, "and as a reward Madame de X—— took me to the circus with papa. It appears that she rewards him, papa also, but I don't know with what."

At the same time it is established that Madame de Maupassant had for these matters a large tolerance. It is seriously recorded of Guy de Maupassant, who was under his mother's direct supervision till he was nearly twenty, that "his youth was absolutely chaste. It was at the age of sixteen that his first liaison became known. It was with the beautiful E——. He never sought for liaisons which were not of an exalted

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

order." At the age of sixteen he was, when not at school, an inmate of his mother's house and her constant companion. She would naturally know of this "liaison" and does not seem to have opposed it in any way. This is, perhaps, the place to quote those lines from *Les Pensées* of Pascal, which should be constantly in the mind of the reader of this book, who from heredity, education and environment may be prone to judge harshly the men and women whose morality and activity are here described :

" On ne voit presque rien de juste ou d'injuste qui ne change de qualité en changeant de climat. Trois degrés d'élévation du pôle renversent toute la jurisprudence. Un méridien décide de la vérité. Plaisante justice qu'une rivière ou une montagne borne. *Vérité en deçà des Pyrénées, erreur audelà.*"

Her separation from her husband was by simple deed drawn up before a county court judge. Gustave agreed to pay her £64 a year towards the maintenance of her two sons. This agreement coincides in date approximately with that of Guy's entrance as a boarder at the school at Yvetot, at the age of thirteen. This suggests that until Gustave withdrew and began making this allowance there were no funds to pay for the boy's board at the seminary and that no sooner had he gone and Madame de Maupassant found herself in unhampered control of her own income, increased by the 1600 francs per annum agreed upon under the settlement with her husband, she promptly made use of the educational advantages which the neighbourhood offered, advantages which very possibly she had



GUSTAVE DE MAUPASSANT, GUY'S FATHER.  
(By courtesy of M. Henri Defontaine.)



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

been unable to afford as long as there was living with her a husband of polygamous temperament and small income, who probably spent on himself and his mistresses much more than the allowance he was receiving from his father in guise of dowry. It is a fact that when some years later this allowance from her husband could no longer be paid to Madame de Maupassant, Guy at that time having provided for himself, she found it impossible to do anything for her son Hervé, then performing his military service as a simple soldier and apparently under humiliating and restricted conditions. For in the letter written by Guy de Maupassant to his mother from the Admiralty in 1877, from which excerpts have been given above, there occurs this passage :

“I’m jolly well pleased that Hervé has at last been made a non-commissioned officer. His life will be quite transformed and very bearable at present. The difference for him will be complete and entire.”

As a common soldier, Hervé would be getting  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. a day. His promotion would put a few extra sous daily into his purse. These were to make this great difference in his life. These words speak eloquently as to the *res angusta* in the Maupassant family.

The sympathy of everybody was at the time of her trials and is to-day with Guy de Maupassant’s mother. Flaubert wrote her a letter to tell her how well he understood her suffering, and more than sixty years later a writer who knew both Guy de Maupassant and his mother says : “Maupassant venerated his mother

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

like a saint. And indeed, she was a saint, by the grace of her sweetness, by the serenity of her soul."

She was a woman of great intelligence and highly educated. She was familiar with the works of Shakespeare in the original, and though she never could get Guy to learn a word of English\* she grounded him well in Latin and guided his early readings. The boy was as bookish at times as at other times he was exuberantly playful and fond of every kind of exercise. His mother compared him to a "colt loose in a field," while paying tribute to his extraordinary precocity at his books. She relates that at the age of eleven, he learned his catechism off by heart, questions and answers, by reading them over twice. At the age of thirteen, just after he went to the seminary boarding school, he was writing verses. As a child he showed great delight in reading and reciting from Shakespeare's "Midsummer Night's Dream."

The child born in the turret room in the château of Miromesnil was *ondoyé* (baptized, not christened) in the little chapel that lies to the right of the broad avenue of beech-trees which leads from the château to the open countryside. The function of *onduement*, the aspersion with water of a new-born child, is usually practised when there is some danger that it may not live until it can be ritually baptized. Maupassant was not baptized until the following year, but

\* He acquired several English phrases later, as some of his love-letters show.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

the *ondoiment* took place when he was eighteen days old, namely on August 23rd, 1850, and this by special license from the Archbishop of Rouen.

The chapel where this ceremony took place is picturesque and ancient. It bears the date 1583 carved upon it. It is set in the thick of the beech-grove. There is a very old bell hanging in a tiny open belfry. The windows are protected by iron bars; the entrance door is low and discreet. Inside even at high noon it is very dark, but this shows up more effectively the painted glass windows, a *Christ aux Outrages*, a kneeling figure in Henri II costume at his prie-Dieu, beside a woman in a cap, also at prayer. There are carved wooden panels of interest but hardly discernible in the *oscuro* of that interior, and there is an iron chancel railing, century-old, on which may be descried the three boars' heads of the Miromesnil family. Here little Guy was *ondoyé*, not because he was in any danger, but, doubtless, because his parents having rented a seigniorial desmesne wished to enjoy every part and privilege thereof, the use of the private chapel being one of these. The *ondoiment* ceremony in a private and historic chapel gave an aristocratic flavour to the child's first appearance in public. It would be recorded at Rouen and in the registry of the diocese.

The *ondoiment* may have been talked about later, and one finds Maupassant using the function as an incident in his story *En Wagon*.

For religious ceremonies of any kind Maupassant

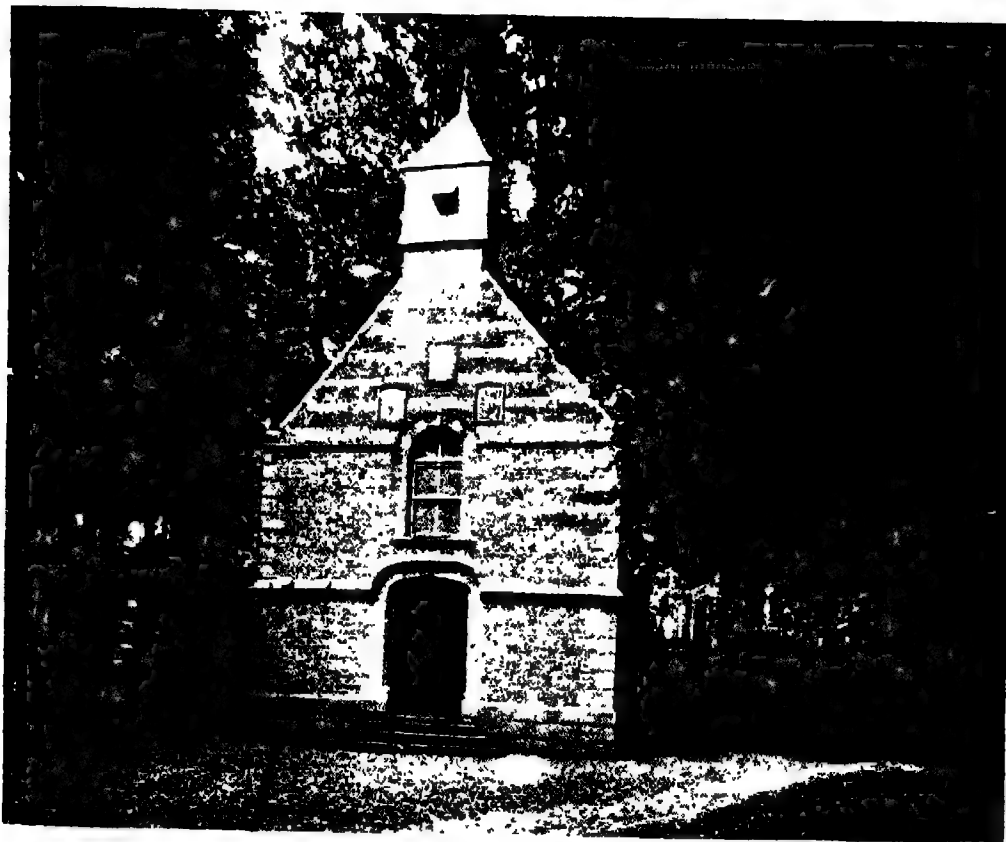


## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

had contempt. He himself told Hugues Leroux his opinions on those matters. "I hate religion," he said. "For the matter of that, as far back as I can remember, I can never recall having been docile on this chapter. As a very small boy, religious rites, the form of religious ceremonies offended me. I could only see in them their ridiculous side."

The ceremony of *ondolement* is at present, by papal decision, not allowed by Rome. In the 'fifties it was only performed over the children of the very noble and the very rich. Maupassant's parents were neither, but liked their neighbours to think them so.

The baptism at the parish church at Tourville-sur-Arques, in the font that had been a dog kennel under the Terror, took place on August 17th, 1851. Guy was baptized by the curé, whose name was Sury and whose character and career were afterwards drawn on for incident and illustration in the stories which the child was to write. He was "held over the baptismal founts"—as the French put it—by two of his grandparents, his paternal grandfather, and the mother of his mother, Victoire-Marie Thurin, veuve Le Poittevin, who had come over from Fécamp for the ceremony. Guy's grandfather on that side, Paul Le Poittevin, deceased, the late husband of Victoire-Marie, transmitted to his descendant some belief in the supernatural. Part of this Paul's possessions was a manor, a *vavassorie*, at Gonneville, near Valognes. The manor was haunted. A black sheep used to appear and terrify people there. Guy's grandfather



PRIVATE CHAPEL IN MIROMESNIL PARK, WHERE GUY WAS BAPTIZED.  
(Photo by E. Pireaux.)



CHURCH AT TOURVILLE-SUR-ARQUES, WHERE GUY WAS CHRISTENED.  
(Photo by E. Pireaux.)



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

hearing of this slept there one night to see the ghost. It duly appeared and said to him : " As long as thou and thy descendants shalt keep this demesne good luck will persist amongst you." After he had made a certain fortune in industrial pursuits, Paul Le Poittevin bought the *vavassorie* of Gonneville, which he bequeathed to his widow, who often had her little grandson Guy over to stay with her in the house where the Black Sheep had appeared to his grandpapa but had not scared him. Guy de Maupassant sometimes spoke of this incident as having been the germ of his belief in a supernatural world, " for me a deduction from the material world."

Among the congregation present at this baptism was a servant woman, whose name was Melanie Arsène Maximilienne Chevalier, who died sixty-one years later as Veuve Corne. They called her Alphon-sine in the Maupassant family, whom she served all the days of her working life. She well remembered Guy's birth at Miromesnil. Seen a year or two before her death by an English writer residing in France, who visited her at the Couvent des Petites Soeurs at Rouen, she spoke of the birth and said that the doctor who attended Madame de Maupassant at the time was Doctor Guiton of Dieppe, but she did not remember any massage of the baby's head by him, and would indeed " have placed herself athwart any such proceeding." She also said that the château was a very expensive place to keep up and that that was why Madame d'Orbigny, the owner, used to let it furnished

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

for six months or a year, mainly to people wanting to spend a summer in the country near Dieppe. Alphonsine attended with Jules de Maupassant, the grandfather from Rouen, in whose service she was. There is on record that at the baptism the child's lovely eyes were greatly admired. According to Edouard Maynial, the official biographer of Guy de Maupassant, whose book is an excellent one although some of his statements such as the following one are contestable and to be refuted, declares that Gustave's eyes (transmitted to his son also) were inherited by Guy's father from his paternal grandmother, the Creole, Miss Murray. But, as has been seen, Miss Murray did not marry the father but the brother of Jules de Maupassant, and so was Gustave's aunt and Guy's great-aunt. Great-aunts transmit no characteristics, otherwise, as doubtless Miss Murray, like so many Creoles, had negro blood in her, there would have been a ready explanation of Guy's extraordinary vitality, force and amateness and of his no less extraordinary fits of the blackest melancholia.

Dubosc states that the Maupassants remained at Miromesnil for three years. Others say the Maupassants left after a brief tenancy. There are no documents in support of either statement. It is probable that Dubosc is wrong. The child had been born at the château, the Regency mansion, had been *ondoyé* in the private chapel dating back to 1583, and baptized with all the pomp due to the gentry from the castle at Tourville-sur-Arques. One can hardly imagine

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

prudent, middle-class people, with a joint income of only £360 a year, prolonging the tenancy of an estate, which even wealthy Madame d'Orbigny found very expensive to keep up.

At any rate it was at Etretat that the real childhood of Guy de Maupassant began.

## CHAPTER VI

The "Dear House"—The Father, An Occasional Guest—A Delightful Boyhood—An Absurd Claim—Flaubert's Unhonoured Status—"A Bad Lot"—Maupassant and Shakespeare—Laura de Maupassant's "Prave Orts"—Guy's Study of Latin—His Popularity With His Playmates—The Blood of The Sea-Raiders.

**A**FTER leaving Miromesnil the Maupassants went to live at a country house belonging to Madame de Maupassant at Etretat, on the road to Fécamp. This place was called Les Verguies, the name deriving from the Norman corruption of the word vergers, which means orchards. Guy de Maupassant always used, in after life, to speak of Les Verguies as "the dear house." It was a beautiful place set against a grove of trees, birches, lime-trees and sycamores, with large gardens all round it, and a balcony overgrown with flowering creeper. From the little wood one had a view of the sea. The garden had been planned by Madame de Maupassant herself. She often used to speak of it in her solitary mourning on the Riviera, where amidst dusty olive trees on barren hillsides parched by the sun, she used to recall with regret the fresh verdure of her native Normandy, nowhere fresher and greener than in that Fécamp district where Les Verguies stood. Here was hawthorn and here was May. The house was painted white and stood white against a background of viridescence. There was honeysuckle, there was virgin

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

creeper, there was jasmine in profusion. The rooms were vast and lofty and crammed with rare old furniture, some inherited, some from the Abbey of Fécamp, many chests and crédences laden with rare Rouen china. It was in this house that Guy passed his boyhood till the age of thirteen. His father was not a permanent dweller in his wife's house, and after the birth of Hervé, the second son, seems to have been little more than an occasional visitor to Les Verguies. This was for the sake of appearances, on the Maupassant principle of "*Cache ta vie.*" Husband and wife though living at times under the same roof occupied separate apartments. Guy, as a child, seems to have known the attraction that ladies not his mother had for his father. One of his letters has been quoted. An anecdote refers to another occasion where the lad showed that he knew very well the power that a certain dame living at Etretat had over his father. Guy and Hervé had been asked to a children's afternoon party at the house of a certain Madame de Z., whose name was at that time associated with that of Monsieur de Maupassant. Hervé, as usual, was ailing, too ill to go and Madame de Maupassant had to stay with him. The father at once offered to escort Guy to the party, showing decided eagerness himself to go. Guy deliberately loitered over his dressing, watching his father's impatience. At last the latter, losing his temper, told the boy that if he did not hurry up he wouldn't take him at all. "Ah!" said Guy, "I am not the least anxious about that, because I know that



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

you want to go there even more than I do." "Well, hurry up, lace up your boots," said the father. "No," said Guy. "You come and lace them for me!" The father gasped. "You know you'll have to come and lace them up if you want me to go to the lady's," said Guy, "so you'd better come and do them at once." And Monsieur Gustave de Maupassant, eager to get to Madame de Z., went and laced up his little boy's boots for him.

Edouard Maynial says that Guy remained friends with his father all his life and was often heard defending him when the subject of his treatment of his wife was being discussed. Gustave on the other hand complained after Guy's death that he had never been an affectionate son to him, having always been under his mother's hostile influence. It is doubtful whether Guy can have had much respect for his father, or he would not have depicted him in unfavourable colours in *Une Vie* and other stories. His dissoluteness may have left his son, who admitted no restrictions, social, religious, or legal to unbridled amateness, perfectly indifferent, yet what could so stern a censor of humanity think of a father who took his child to the house of his mistress, and who later on accompanied him to the Maisons Tellier, which his curiosity or his carnality prompted him to visit?

At Les Verguies Guy spent a delightful boyhood, until he was thirteen years of age. His mother used to say that the reason why she brought him up at home was that she wanted him to receive in the main his

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

impressions from Nature, to learn to love the beautiful, so that he might develop into the poet that she foresaw in him, certain as she was that he would come to resemble his uncle Alfred. The true reason was probably that Monsieur Gustave's expenses on the Madame X's and de Z's so reduced the family income that the fees for putting Guy to a boarding school were not available. It is incredible that any Frenchwoman of the bourgeoisie class and of very moderate means could seriously contemplate making a writer of her eldest son. In those days the idea of taking up the profession of letters in France as a career by a youth was even more repulsive to parents than it is to-day, when it is understood that under certain circumstances good incomes, even fortunes may be acquired—as witness the examples of Monsieur Zola or Monsieur Xavier de Montépin. Her hopes for Guy seem to have been that he would make a place for himself in the law or as a functionary, in which latter case it would be a good thing for him to be able to earn an income with his pen as so many officials do in any country where Government offices provide leisure, stationery and subsistence. But that Guy was to launch out as a writer, even if one could hope that he might come to rival her friend Gustave Flaubert, and to seek a living at first from miserably paid contributions to the Press, certainly not. The opinion in French middle-classes on journalists in the 'fifties and 'sixties was similar to that which prevailed towards the end of the eighteenth century in England, when it was

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

written that Doctor Dodd might yet have retrieved his character and position under certain circumstances, but that taking the wrong road "he sank so low as to become the editor of a newspaper," after which Tyburn Tree was considered to afford a suitable dénouement. For in the Poittevin and kindred families the great Gustave Flaubert was considered very much as William Wordsworth used to be in youth and early manhood, indeed until he was well into middle-age. There was a Monsieur Bourlet de la Vallée, who long after Flaubert had made his name universally known used to express about him the opinion of the Normandy bourgeoisie. "Gustave," he would exclaim, "a good heart, imagination, originality, but no judgment. He never had but one idea in his miserable head, to play the acrobat. With his paradoxes he made his father die of grief. He wanted to strangle his mother. Twelfth-rate novelist, with his *Bovary* (a rotten book) he managed to get himself seated in the dock of a police-court." This police-court business, which the press-agent of a modern author would consider very fine and valuable publicity, was very severely judged in the family circles; and, as will be seen later, when a local bench wished to prosecute Guy de Maupassant on similar grounds, every effort was made by Flaubert's pupil to have the matter hushed up.

There was certainly nothing in the achievements of Gustave Flaubert from a worldly point of view to inspire his friend Laure de Maupassant with any

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

wish to see her son, Guy, follow in his footsteps. Twenty-one years after he had given to the world his masterpiece, *Madame Bovary*, Bourlet de la Vallée's son speaks of him to Doctor Fauvel—as recorded by George Dubosc—as “an idiot, wrong-headed, a bad boy.” “Gustave Flaubert,” accordingly writes Dubosc in his *Trois Normands*, “was living in Rouen more misunderstood than the sellers of cider or a docker on the quays.” It would be an insult to the practical bourgeois common-sense of Madame de Maupassant to believe her story that she had wanted and hoped Guy to become a writer of such masterpieces as had brought Gustave Flaubert to the social position that Monsieur Dubosc so graphically describes.

Whatever may have been her motive in keeping her child at home, in allowing him to run wild, “like a colt let loose” Laure de Maupassant certainly succeeded in giving him the happiest years of a life which was to be so singularly unhappy. He had at Etretat for ten golden years the fullest joy of living. His mother was often his companion, his playmate. There is a story of how one day the two were nearly caught by the tide and of how the sturdy, little fellow led his mother, dishevelled, to safety. He played with the peasant children and with the fishermen's children. He was leader of a gang. They played at pirates. There were caves for smugglers, there were rocks to climb, there was the devil of Verguies, about whom a legend goes, to summon forth to do his worst. “He loved to play with children of his own age, but he took

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

interest also in conversations on serious matters." His mother says of him: "He was the most joyous lad in the world, expansive, jovial, ardent in the quest of amusement." Madame François, on the other hand, his Etretat playmate, to-day speaks of him as she knew him sixty-five years ago as "imperious and proud." He was "pas commode," she remembers, but "cold, contemptuous, irascible." There was no precocity in his amateness, in spite of his father's bad example and the boy's understanding of evil. He attempted no love-making or philandering with any of the girls with whom he played. His mother, Madame François relates, made him work hard at his books. She remembers him dressed in the uniform of a public school boy, though at that time he was not attached to any public school. His mother read English with him, taught him to admire Shakespeare, and says that reading *Macbeth* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* made him understand for the first time how by the used of words "one can evoke beings, and depict things, and animate with higher, overflowing, eternal life, that Nature of which he felt the power."

"Prave orts" is what Maupassant would say, with that faint ironical smile of his, could he read these lines from Maynial's biography and had his remembrance of his Shakespeare readings so far survived that evil passing of the Styx. It is doubtful whether Shakespeare had any influence on him at all; there is not a reference to him in any of his books, no thought, no expression that can be traced back to this mighty

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

source. In the perusal of Macbeth what may have arrested his intention would be the passage where Malcolm describes—at the time when he is representing himself as unfit to sit upon the throne of Scotland—his excessive philoprogenitiveness and is assured that even unreasonable demands in that direction can be satisfied. He certainly emulated in later life the character that Malcolm then and there gave himself. Maupassant would read the play in a French translation, probably that of François Victor Hugo. For Maupassant never learned any foreign living language, could not assimilate them, probably did not want to do so. This is one reason of the extraordinary limpidity and beauty of his style. The great writers in any language are those who know no other tongue than theirs. Can “The Pilgrim’s Progress” be conceived as it would have been written had John Bunyan resided in France under the protection of the Edict of Nantes, say till three years before his death? The polylingual writer thinks in foreign tongues and his expressions and turns of thought bewilder and displease his countrymen readers. Maupassant had a veritable cultus for his mother tongue, which he considered as greatly superior to any other, as he held France above all other countries.

As a child Guy had no other teacher than his mother. Apparently a governess could not be afforded. When he was a little older, the vicaire of Etretat, the abbé Aubourg, gave him lessons. In aristocratic French families an abbé to act as tutor to

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

the boys is considered an indispensable part of an establishment. Abbé Aubourg taught Guy grammar, arithmetic and Latin. Maupassant liked Latin and enjoyed his study of it. Later he used sometimes to use it in quotation. He once likened himself to a *quercus in solitudine*. In his youth the comparison was an apt one. His out-of-door life, his violent exercise on land and at sea, swimming, climbing, wrestling, fighting, riding, boating in the splendid air of Etretat had given him "robust health and remarkable physical vigour. His photographs, his portraits and the recollections of those who knew him between the ages of ten and twenty show him to us with his thickset figure, his neck powerful like that of a young bull, with all the indomitable energy of 'a glutton of life,' as he used to call himself at that age."

His studies of Latin were continued until he had taken his bachelor's degree. While he was preparing for this at the Lycée Corneille at Rouen he was being coached at a private school called l'Institution Leroy-Petit. Here he attended a Latin class given by an usher who is called Piquedent in the story Maupassant afterwards wrote about him. This is the story called *La Question du Latin*, which appears in the volume entitled *Toine*, and it is interesting apart from the story, because here is one of the rare occasions in which Maupassant shows pity for and sympathy with the person about whom he is writing.

In his frequentations of the Normandy peasants he acquired a perfect knowledge of the Norman patois,

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

the language spoken in Normandy, which, unbeautiful in the main, is not without striking words and phrases. This knowledge was to stand him in excellent stead when he came to write his stories of Norman peasant life. In later life, he acquired some knowledge of colloquial Italian, as shown in "*Les Soeurs Rondoli*."

His peasant boy companions adored him. He was the pirate captain, the chief of the smugglers, the leader of the raids, the skipper at sea, the first for them in everything. He returned their affection, and the lad who as a man was later on to be accused of unworthy class prejudices showed on several occasions that he considered his boy friends his equals in everything except perhaps athletic prowess. His mother used to tell a story about him illustrating the absolute sense of equality with which he considered his playmates. One day a picnic party had been arranged between him, a boy of his own bourgeois class and a fisherman's boy called Charles. Guy and Charles go to fetch the other boy. The latter's mother receives them: Guy, with effusion, a Monsieur de Maupassant, who could call himself Comte de Maupassant if he chose, but Charles, a common urchin, son of a fishing fellow, with hauteur.

"Charles," she said, "will of course carry the basket of provisions."

"Oh, dear me, no," cried Guy, taking the basket away from Charles, who was reddening with mortification. "We're all going to carry the basket in turns, and it's I who carry it first."



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

He was beloved by the fishermen and was their constant companion on their cruises. Most often he went out with a Fécamp pilot, and the roughest weather at sea never kept him ashore. He had absolutely no fear, he who later was to analyse Fear with such terrible skill. Madame de Maupassant used to speak of occasions when, the boy being out at sea in the storm, she used to wait down on the beach with the wives of the crew, who were praying and evoking the saints for their men in danger. Guy loved the sea and the sailor's craft. He used to say: "I feel that I have in my veins the blood of the sea raiders. I have no greater joy, than on a spring morning, to sail with my boat into unknown ports, to walk about all day in a new stage-setting, amidst men whom I elbow, whom I shall never see again, whom I shall leave as soon as night falls, to go out to sea again and to sleep in the open, to turn my helm whither fancy may prompt me, with no regret for the houses where lives are born, endure, frame themselves in, and die away—with no desire ever to cast anchor anywhere; fair as the sky overhead may be, smiling as the land may be."

His life as a boy in Normandy prepared him as a writer to give those wonderful descriptions of Norman peasant character, of Normandy scenes on land and sea, that have won for this scion of a Lorrain family, mixed with the blood of Poitou, the title of "The Norman story-teller."

## CHAPTER VII

Souvenirs and Fiction—Norman Characteristics—Maupassant and the Bishop—A Candidate for Confirmation—The Photograph and the Pastel—Daudet on Maupassant's Eyes—A Poet at Thirteen—The Yvetot Seminary—Malingerings—Guy as an Actor—Expulsion from Yvetot.

“**L**IKE the heroine of his novel *Une Vie*,” writes M. Edouard Maynial, “whose youth in this Norman land he has depicted, Maupassant has strewn his souvenirs everywhere, just as one strews grains of wheat—those souvenirs, the roots of which hold on until death. In these narrow confines, made however by Nature extraordinarily varied, the author moves his personages to and fro and finds with them the trivial happenings and the accustomed pleasures which marked his youth: it is he who goes to sea with the boatmen of Yport, to visit the caves along the coast—like Jeanne in *Une Vie*—or to fish or pull up by moonlight the nets that had been let down the night before, it's he again who sails across the ponds along very roads cut through a forest of dead reeds, spending whole days in rowing, seated between his two dogs, all taken up in his mind with plans for shooting or fishing expeditions, and it is he again whose wild gallops across the vast plains, scourged by the winds from the sea, he describes.”

While his body developed, his character seems to have kept pace. With the Norman air that he has inhaled and the Norman cider that he has drunk he

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

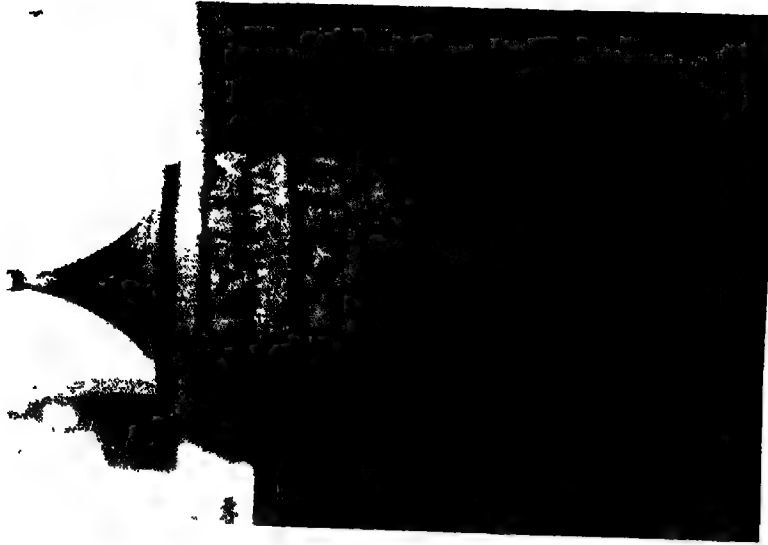
has imbibed also Norman characteristics. These are so well known in England, where they are held, because of the dominant race, the loftiest manifestations of human excellence, that they need not be detailed here, with, however, the exception of one or two qualities which are not very readily admitted as theirs by the Normans on either side of the Channel. One of these qualities is what the French call *hâblerie*, for which there is no real equivalent in the English vocabulary. It is the practice of tall-talking, of boasting, of exaggeration of personal feats. Maupassant soon acquired this characteristic, though he kept it in perfect check when at his writing-desk. The other is *finauderie*, also taboo in the English vocabulary, which means petty ruse, not always strictly honest. This quality Maupassant displayed on a memorable occasion and at an early age.

This was on the occasion of his examination by the Bishop of Rouen for confirmation. It will be remembered that he had learned the whole catechism, questions and answers, by reading the book over twice only. When he came before the Bishop, who wished to examine the lads to see if they were prepared for the sacrament of confirmation, Guy had forgotten most of the formulary. Madame de Maupassant, who tells the story, was very nervous. It would be a disgrace if her son were to be refused for confirmation. The Bishop tells Guy to follow him into the vestry. Presently Guy returns, looking radiant.

"Well?" asks the anxious mother.

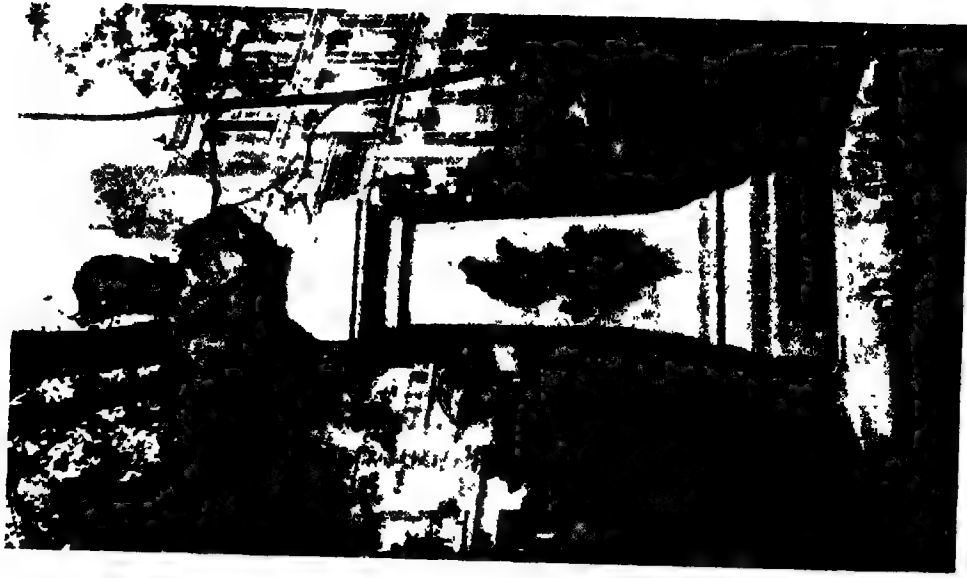


MAUPASSANT'S STATUE IN PARIS.



FONT AT TOURVILLE CHURCH, WHERE GUY WAS CHRISTENED. DURING THE TERROR IT WAS USED AS A DOG-KENNEL.

(Photo by M Langlel )



MAUPASSANT'S STATUE IN ROUEN.



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

"It's all right, mother," says Guy. "I didn't know my catechism, but I told My Lord that the Paris catechism, which I did know, was not verbally the same as the Rouen catechism, which is used here. So Monseigneur didn't question me on the catechism but asked me about religion, and I answered him all right and I'm passed all right for confirmation."

One would like to have Monseigneur's account of this interview.

Twelve months previously, as is usual in the Catholic Church, Guy had partaken of his first communion. A photograph of him at the time is extant. It shows him full length standing by a little table on which is a book, on which he is resting his hand. He is dressed in a grey suit, with long trousers and a short, braided jacket opening on a waistcoat buttoned up to the neck. Dubosc finds that in this portrait there is a striking resemblance between Guy, the boy, and the Guy de Maupassant in Gervex's pastel. As to which, it is the opinion of some that Henri Gervex's pastel, "*à son ami Guy de Maupassant*," if it resemble him as a lad, is not a portrait that his friends will like to remember him by. The expression of the eyes is terrifying, and their aspect seems to reveal the fact that the eyes of Guy de Maupassant did not work in harmony, those eyes of which Alphonse Daudet once said: "His eyes alone at times made me feel anxious; eyes which did not look, closed, gliding, impenetrable; eyes of striated agate, which absorbed the light but did not give it forth again."

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

"Guy partook of the sacrament at his first communion with fervour," related Madame de Maupassant. She did not add that on this occasion the lad had a veritable crisis of hysteria. It was his recollection of the feelings that had moved him then that enabled him so graphically to depict the scene at the first communion in the village church in *La Maison Tellier*, written twenty years later.

When he was not with his mother at Etretat, the boy was at his maternal grandfather's house at Fécamp, where he would hear the story of the black sheep and the haunted house, or else at a château called Bornambusc, which belonged to his uncle, Harnois de Blengues, whom Laura Le Poittevin's sister had married. This aunt of his was the one and only one of his relatives who nursed him in those terrible last days of his, at Doctor Blanche's establishment in Passy.

At the age of thirteen Guy was writing poetry. His very first verses, religiously preserved by his mother, began as follows :

"La vie est le sillon d'un vaisseau qui s'éloigne  
C'est l'éphémère fleur qui croît sur la montagne  
C'est l'ombre de l'oiseau qui traverse l'éther  
C'est le cri du marin englouti par la mer.

and so on. The poem ends with the two lines :

La vie est un brouillard qui se change en lumière  
C'est l'unique moment donné pour la prière."

"Rhymes followed rhymes," writes M. Ed. Spali-



GUY DE MAUPASSANT AS A BOY OF TEN AT  
THE TIME OF HIS CONFIRMATION.

*(This photograph is said to be very like him as he  
was when years later Henry Gercey did a pastel  
- portrait of him. See plate facing page 352.)*





## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

kowski, a Normandy author of great distinction and a fervent admirer of Guy de Maupassant, in his little book on Maupassant's haunts: *Autour d'Yvetot*, dealing with Maupassant's schooldays at the Yvetot seminary. "Rhymes followed upon rhymes, and the blackened pages were to find the sweetest of graves in the maternal chest-of-drawers." From which, thirty or forty years later, they were to be disinterred to be shown to those who came to speak with the poor blind woman about Monsieur Guy.

Maupassant used to say later that when he was a boy his idea of what education ought to do for him was to make him into a fine animal, supple and strong. His mother, however, had other views and having, when he reached the age of thirteen—that is to say, in 1863—means to do so, sent him as a boarder to the seminary at Yvetot. It was here that he grew to hate religion and its ministers. The boy who had been so profoundly moved at his first communion jettisoned all belief, and before he was fourteen had pronounced all religious questions: "The Eternal Nothing."

He hated his confinement at Yvetot, he hated the discipline, the restrictions, the religious ceremonies, so many mummeries to him. To get away, back to Etretat and his free life, he began to practise malingering. He pretended to be ill, and so cleverly, that in alarm the reverend fathers sent the boy home. At Etretat he almost immediately recovered his robust health and then would be sent back to the seminary again, where after enduring his confinement

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

for some time he would repeat the manoeuvre. The question presents itself whether this malingering, by informing him on "symptoms" and concentrating his thoughts on ailments and disease, may not have been, unknown to him, in some degree, apprenticeship to that rôle of imaginary invalid which in later years was to cause him such torment. For there is a mental preparation for neurasthenia. People who are always pretending to be ill so as to deceive others, in quest of sympathy or benefits, very often end in deceiving themselves as to their state of health. Long before he was really very ill Maupassant was torturing himself about his state, and, curious reversal of things, when he was in desperate case he tried to deceive himself into the belief that the disease which was playing such havoc with him was of little importance.

For the purposes of these malingering comedies, Maupassant was well equipped. He was an excellent actor and mimic, and later in life showed that he might have been a successful player. There will be recorded theatricals in which he took part as author and performer which were appreciated and applauded. Already, as a boy, he showed himself possessed of this gift in a high degree. It is still remembered at Etretat how one day a rich, old English lady, who used to come to Etretat for the season, and who was afterwards limned by Maupassant in the rôle of Miss Harriet, another of the stories in which he shows human sympathy and pity and manifests the heart that usually he so carefully concealed, received the

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

call of several young ladies, the eldest and spokeswoman of whom was a fine girl with thick hair and remarkable eyes. This girl was introduced as Mademoiselle Renée de Valmont. It was Carnival time, and this perhaps explained to the Englishwoman why Miss de Valmont seemed to be wearing a badly disguised, incipient moustache. Miss de Valmont was plastered over with rice-powder. The Englishwoman was gracious. Renée de Valmont seemed shy and stood with her eyes on the ground.

"You have been travelling, I hear, Mademoiselle," said the lady.

"Oh, yes. I have travelled a great deal. For instance, I have just come from Nouméa."

"A-oh! Nouméa!"

"Yes; I have friends down there."

Nouméa, it should be explained, is in New Caledonia, the French Australian colony, and is mainly populated by convicts.

"A-oh! Such a long voyage all alone!"

"No, with my two lady's-maids."

"But even with lady's-maids. To go so far away, a young girl."

The Englishwoman was described as *très pudibonde*.

"Oh, I have no reason to be afraid. I have a dragoon and a cuirassier in my service."

"A-oh! Shocking!"

Whereupon all the girls burst out laughing and the old maid understood at last that Miss de Valmont had

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

been "pulling her leg." It appears she was greatly offended and that Madame de Maupassant had to pacify her with very strong apologies.

This boyish escapade supplied Maupassant with the plot of his story "*Rose*," in which a convict takes a post as lady's-maid to a fashionable woman, who is perhaps less horrified when the police come to her house and unmask Rose as an escaped "lag," than she is mortified because this charming young man, who had been sent to prison for rape, had never offered to take the least liberties with her. "I felt humiliated," she says to a friend in telling the story. This story was to the English taste, for no sooner had it appeared in Paris than it was pirated for *The World*, in London, by a lady writer who obtained most of the plots for her stories and novels by plundering French authors in general and Maupassant in particular. In *The World* version of "*Rose*" the narrator's expression of regret at the convict's indifference towards her was judiciously suppressed, possibly by Yates. Yates must have been privy to the piracy by which he had come by the story, for when this was pointed out to him he vented his ire, not on his dishonest contributor, but on the friend of Guy de Maupassant who had drawn his attention to the deception practised on him, the readers of *The World*, and on the real author of the story. Maupassant, as will be seen, was plundered wholesale, and only on one occasion, towards the end of his career, did he take any steps to protect himself.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

The "pulling of legs," which was always Maupassant's delight, was a favourite pastime of his even in his boyish days. On the cliffs at Etretat there are to be seen old boats, which, no longer fit for sea-service, have been carted up there to be used as sheds or even dwelling-places. People often used to wonder how these big boats got up so high above sea-level, and Maupassant, as a boy, used to say: "Oh, we have such terrifically big waves at Etretat that they sweep right up and over the cliffs, and when they fall back leave anything they have brought with them behind. That's how those boats got left there."

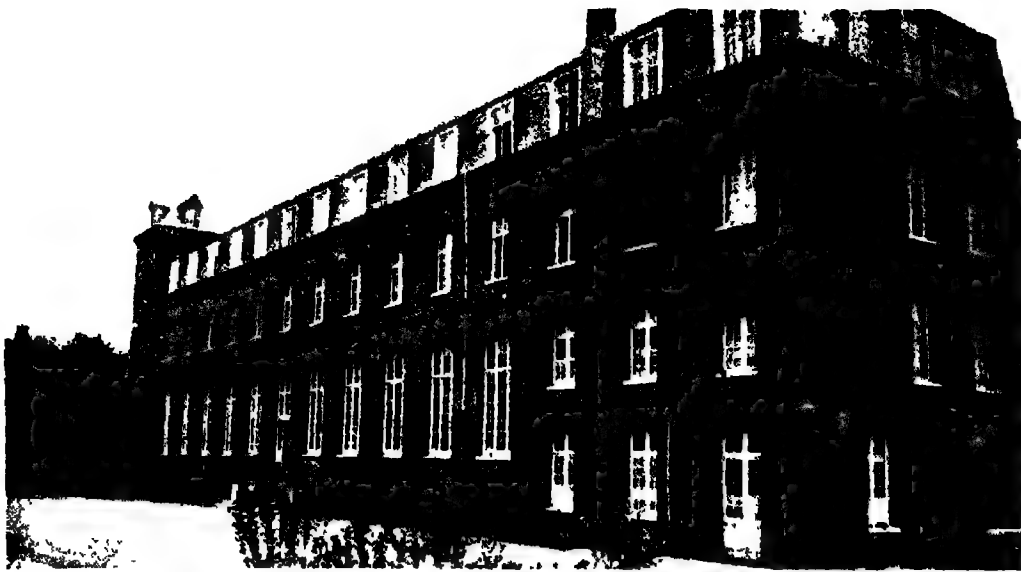
His fondness for mimicry got him once into trouble at his school. When he imitated before the assembled class, in the absence of the master, a professor of theology who had been depicting for the boys the horrors of hell, he was caught in the act and was warned that a repetition of such conduct might entail his expulsion. This threat produced exactly the opposite impression of the one intended, for Maupassant hated his school and most of his school-fellows. These were mainly the sons of farmers, who had come to the seminary to be trained for the Church as a means of escaping military service. That was before the "*sac au dōs*" days, and when a priest was exempted from conscription. It was here that he acquired that contempt of priests which is shown over and over again in his writings. On his uncouth playmates he was continually playing practical jokes, and these had to be put up with as Guy was the strongest boy in the

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

school and had proved himself a lad not to be trifled with. He made several unsuccessful attempts to run away from school, but eventually decided that malingering secured him liberty with the least exertion and discomfort. The prospect, however, of expulsion was too delightful a one not to be pondered over. To be able to turn his back for good on that "citadel of Norman mentality," as Hugues Leroux calls the Yvetot seminary, what a consummation!

He came to the conclusion that the best way to bring it about would be to cause the reverend fathers to suspect his moral principles, which as a matter of fact were irreproachable at that moment, the "Belle E——," who initiated him into the roses and raptures, only coming into his life a few months later. So Guy set to work and produced a poem, addressed to a girl who had just been married, which he left lying where it was bound to fall into the hands of the Father Superior. This occurred. The poem was considered, if not in the least immoral, of a dangerous sentimentality, tending to sexuality, but what gave real offence were the couplets forming *envoi*, in which the rebellious young scholar protested against his life in the solitary cloister. Here are the first two verses of this poem :

Comment, relégué loin du monde  
Privé de l'air, des champs, des bois  
Dans la tristesse qui m'inonde  
Faire entendre une douce voix?



● VIEWS OF YVETÔT SEMINARY AS IT IS TO-DAY.





## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

**Vous m'avez dit : Chantez des fêtes  
Où les fleurs et les diamants  
S'enlacent sur de blondes têtes.  
Chantez le bonheur des amants.**

The reverend fathers would be grieved at the reference to the happiness of lovers, but what gave them most offence was the following verse, which is repeated three times and forms the *envoi* of the piece :

**Mais dans le cloître solitaire  
Où nous sommes ensevelis  
Nous ne connaissons sur terre  
Que soutanes et surplis.**

This sneering reference to sacerdotal vestments was more than the fathers could bear. The porter of the seminary was ordered to escort the scholar Maupassant back to his mother. He was expelled. In handing him over to Madame de Maupassant, the porter, who had no relish for his job, said : " Master Guy, all the same, is a very good boy." For which testimonial, Madame de Maupassant doubled his drink of cider for him.

Guy was too hugely delighted to pay much heed to his mother's perfunctory scolding. A moment later he was in her arms, being caressed. Then she said :

" Now, my lad, you'll go to school at the Lycée at Rouen."

Guy was quite satisfied with this arrangement. It was not school so much that he objected to, it was the companionship of boors and the religious mummeries

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

of Yvetot Seminary. At Rouen he would see life, the kind of life that was at last beginning to interest him.

Madame Laure de Maupassant, whose native pride prevented her from admitting that her son had been expelled the seminary, explained his removal in the following letter to Gustave Flaubert, written in March, 1866:

"At present, I must force myself to turn my eyes on the future; I have two children whom I love with all my forces and who perhaps will give me still some happy days. The younger, up till now, has been only a good little peasant-boy, but the elder is already a serious, young man. The poor lad has seen and understands much, and is almost too mature for his fifteen years of age. He will remind you of his uncle Alfred, whom he resembles in many respects, and I am sure that you will love him. I have just been obliged to take him away from the school at Yvetot, where they refused to grant me a dispensation for him from the meatless regime of Lent, a dispensation insisted upon by the doctors; it is a queer way of understanding Christ's religion, unless I make a very great mistake. My son is not seriously ill, but he suffers from nervous debility, which exacts a most fortifying diet, and, besides, he did not like being there, the austerity of this cloistered life did not suit his fine and sensitive nature and the poor child was being suffocated behind those lofty walls which shut out every sound from the outer world. I am thinking of putting him at the Lycée at Havre for eighteen months, after which I should go and fix myself in Paris for his years of rhetoric and philosophy" (the last two years of a French lycéen's scholastic course). "Hervé would be a day-boarder in some school or other, and I should thus be able to watch over my two darling treasures myself.

"Thou seest that I have written to thee at length, my dear comrade, and I feel that it has done me good to do so. Adieu. Think sometimes of our childhood friendship, and receive a very cordial and very affectionate shake of the hand."

## •           OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

This letter was signed "Le Poittevin de Maupassant."

It should be noted that Guy had taken the prize of excellence at the seminary at the end of the year preceding his expulsion, and was in the second class (corresponding to the fifth in England). His mother was delighted with him. She used to say that nobody could imagine what a delightful boy he was. As to his poems, she was wont to say: "I judge his school-boy verses at their worth. But all the same, I assure you, therē are in them real poetical qualities." She especially liked the one about life.

## CHAPTER VIII

At The Lycée Corneille—Was Maupassant Ever Here At All?—Louis Bouilhet, Philosopher, Guide and Friend—Maupassant Quotes Him—Maupassant's Poetical Progress—His Mediocre Scholastic Achievement—Observations and Experiences in Rouen—Anglophobia and Anti-Clericalism.

“**I** AM not sure that Guy de Maupassant was ever a pupil at this school. There is certainly no trace of him here. In my own opinion, I don't believe he was here at all.”

“But is there not preserved in the Golden Book of the Lycée a poem of his on God?”

“No, I don't think so. I have never seen it, never even heard of it. I fancy there must be some mistake.”

“But his biographers all say that he was a boarder here for some years, after he left Yvetot Seminary, that he took his bachelor's degree from here.”

“I know nothing about that. I have heard nothing to that effect. There must be a mistake somewhere. But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll ask our professor of literature what he knows about it and will let you know. I'll write you if I get any information, but I don't expect to have anything to write.”

The above is, almost stenographically reported, a conversation which took place in the first days of November of last year (1925) in the principal's room at the Lycée Corneille, in Rouen, between the head-

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

master of that famous scholastic establishment and an English writer who was collecting facts on the life of Guy de Maupassant. It may be added that, as he later heard indirectly, the professor of literature knew no more about Maupassant's attendance at the school in the late 'sixties of last century than the headmaster himself. And no communication from the latter ever reached the English writer in question.

There is a divergence of statements as to Maupassant's schooldays at Rouen. Edouard Maynial writes that directly after his expulsion from Yvetot, Madame de Maupassant sent him as a boarder to Rouen Lycée. That this is erroneous is established by the letter from her to Flaubert, written after Guy had been sent home. It is also a fact that no record of his having ever been a boarder there can be discovered. The present principal's views on the subject have been quoted. George Dubosc in his "Trois Normands" states, probably with authority, that it was only when he was in his nineteenth year—*i.e.*, in the autumn of 1868—that Guy went to the Lycée at Rouen, as a day-scholar. There is little or nothing with which this hiatus between his leaving Yvetot and his appearance at the Lycée Corneille can be filled up, except that reference to the "beautiful E—," who put a period to his youthful innocence. This was in 1866, and it is probable that whilst this intrigue was going on, scholastic pursuits were abandoned, the old, wild roaming life on land and sea reverted to, and for mental exercise little beyond a constant writ-

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

ing of verses. It seems probable that some time in 1867 Madame de Maupassant moved to Rouen with her two sons and that both were placed as day-boys at the private school which Maupassant, in his story : *La Question du Latin*, has named l'Institution Robineau, but which appears to have been l'Institution Leroy-Petit, the principal of which Maupassant describes as "a little man as full of cunning as a monkey, with, as a matter of fact, all the grotesque and grimacing physique of a monkey." The Maupassants were living at that time in the rue Dulong, in the Hôtel de Ville quarter. It is to be feared that Maupassant did not confine his activities to this quarter, peaceful, commercial and proper. It is recorded that he then began to explore those regions bordering the river, where he was afterwards to discover the plot of *La Maison Tellier*. He would often in those days pass that number 44 in the rue des Charrettes, where years later Adrienne Legay was to take her life, after having rendered him rich and famous. His mother never seems to have attempted to check him in any way in this direction, but to have admitted his fugues with smiling toleration, in his schoolboy days as much as afterwards when he was a man and his own master. She seems to have taken it into her head that there were the making of a poet in Guy, and may have considered that it would redound to his credit and social position if he could make a name for himself as such. But she was certainly too level-headed and shrewd a woman ever to have contemplated, as some writers

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

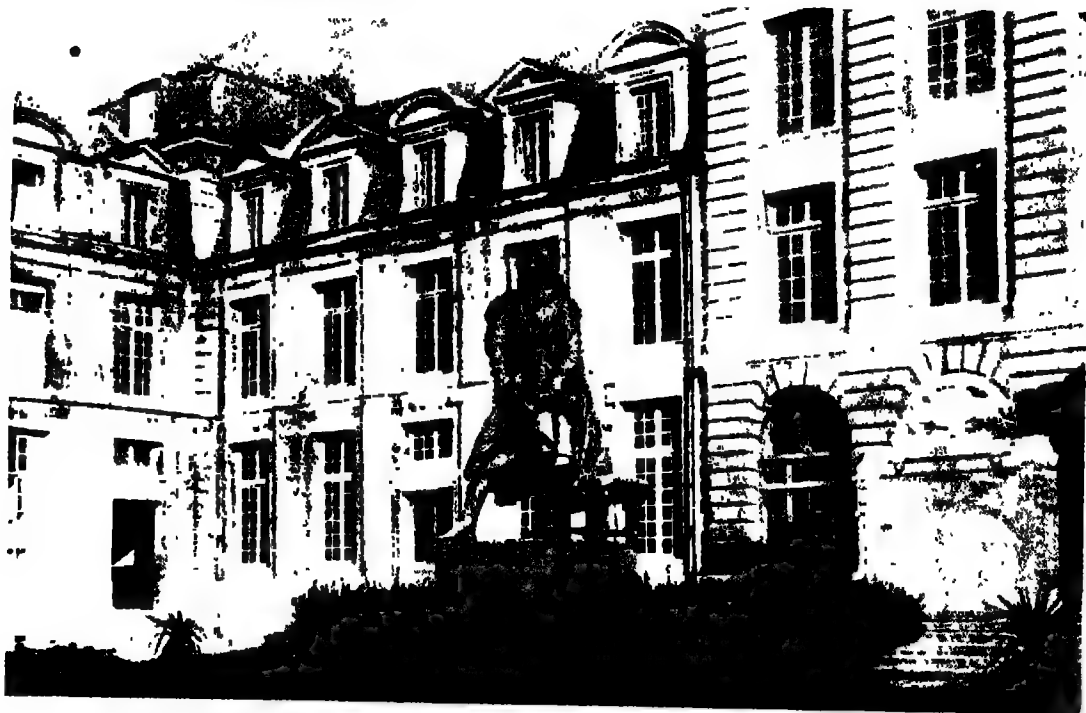
maintain, the possibility of his making a career of poetry or literature. Her intimate friend Gustave Flaubert was there to serve as an example and a warning. He had won notoriety out of letters but nothing else. It is true that his enthusiasm for literary creation was the only reward that he coveted, and, as to material gains, it is on record that when Dalloz of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* once handed him a thousand-franc note (£40) in payment for three short stories which he had contributed to that ponderous review, he exclaimed: "So there really is money in writing." As a matter of fact, for writers of less importance than Flaubert, there was really very little money in writing for the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, which is probably the reason why the practical Maupassant later on declared that one of the three things which he did not intend to do was to write for the *Revue*, the official organ, as it was, of what Pailleron afterwards called *Le Monde Où l'On S'Ennuie*. This resolution Maupassant afterwards broke, as he did also that of not accepting a decoration. He actually did accept the humble violet rosette of the Instruction Publique, but only wore it on one occasion. It was currently reported that the *Revue* people never paid contributors for the first article published in its pages, and, on the principle that most writers have one and only one good article in them, never accepted a second.

In pursuance of her ambition to make a poet of Guy, Madame de Maupassant requested the kindly help and guidance of Louis Bouilhet, a poet and



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

dramatic writer of great standing in those days. His most famous play was *La Conjuración d'Amboise*, but a list of his works surrounds his bust over the fountain set in the Museum buildings in the rue Thiers, which stands between the statue of Flaubert on the left and that of his former pupil, Guy de Maupassant, round the corner in the Museum gardens on his right. Maupassant, poor fellow, by the way, who so loved warmth and sunlight while on this earth, has been placed looking due north-east, a circumstance which distresses any admirer of his who passes through the Jardin Solférino at Rouen. Louis Bouilhet, who is generally referred to as the author of *Meloenis* and *Les Fossiles*, had been the childhood friend not only of Gustave Flaubert but also of Alfred and Laure Le Poittevin. He remained Flaubert's most intimate friend till his death. In his preface to Bouilhet's posthumous work *Dernières Chansons*, Flaubert magnificently describes this friendship and all that it meant to him. When Madame de Maupassant left Guy alone at Rouen and returned to Etretat, she appointed Louis Bouilhet her son's "correspondent." In French schools, where boys are boarded away from their families, who reside in other towns, each boy has a "correspondent" in the town where he is at school, either a relative or a friend of the family's, who acts as his guardian and friend. It is he whom he visits when he has leave; it is to him that he looks for entertainment and amusement. Guy visited Bouilhet regularly and seems to some extent to have been in-



COURTYARD OF THE LYCÉE CORNEILLE AT ROUEN.



TYPICAL NORMAN PEASANT-FARMER'S FARM IN THE MAUPASSANT COUNTRY,  
WHICH MAY HAVE SERVED FOR THE SCENE OF SCORES OF HIS TALES OF THE  
NORMAN PEASANTS.  
(Photo by R. Pireaux.)



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

fluenced by him. Bouilhet was supposed to guide his steps to Parnassus, and it was said by Madame de Maupassant that had Bouilhet lived, he would have made a poet of Guy. As to his teachings, Maupassant refers to them in his famous preface to *Pierre et Jean*, in which he writes :

“ Bouilhet, whom I first knew in a somewhat intimate manner, about two years before I won the friendship of Flaubert, by dint of repeating to me that a hundred lines of verse, and perhaps even fewer, suffice to make an artist's reputation, if they be irreproachable, and contain the quintessence of the talent and originality of a man of even the second quality, made me understand that constant labour and a complete knowledge of one's craft, may one day of limpidity, power and impulse, by the fortunate find of a subject which is in good concordance with all the tendencies of one's thought, bring about the flowering of the short, unique piece, as perfect as it is possible for us to produce.”

Bouilhet had here been inculcating the truth that Balzac formulated in his words : “ *Le travail constant est la loi de l'art comme celle de la vie, car l'art c'est la création idéalisée.* ” He may have had Gray's Elegy in mind.

Another of the very rare references that Maupassant makes to the “ correspondent ” at Rouen, who tried to make a poet of him, occurs in an unpleasant story of his called : *Nos Anglais*, one of the tales in the volume entitled : *Toine*. This narrative, which is supposed to be copied from a diary left by a traveller in a railway carriage, describes the annoyance of a Frenchman by the presence of several English clergymen and their wives and daughters in an hotel at

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

Mentone, "that capital of the consumptives." This passage occurs :

"Other habitués arrive, all English. Only one of them is fat and ruddy, with white whiskers. Each woman (there are fourteen of them) has the whipped white of an egg on her head. I notice that this sweet, which is also a head-covering, is made of white lace or of foamy tulle. I can't say which. It doesn't seem to have sugar in it. For the rest all these ladies look like vinegar pickles, although it is quite true that amongst them are five young girls, who are not too ugly but flat-chested, hopelessly flat-chested.

"I think of Bouilhet's lines :

What matters to me, thy thin bosom, O beloved object !  
One is nearer to the heart when the chest is flat ;  
And I see, like a blackbird shut up in a cage,  
Love a-dream, standing on one leg, between your ribs ! "

There was great mourning amongst the Maupassants, the Le Poittevins, and Gustave Flaubert, when Louis Bouilhet died on July 18th, 1869. This early demise may not have been altogether for young Guy de Maupassant as sad an occurrence as it seemed at the time.

During his apprenticeship to the art of poetry under Louis Bouilhet, Maupassant produced various pieces of poetry, mainly of the madrigal variety. An "Epistle addressed to Madame X——, who found him wild," is still remembered, and a "Jeunesse." Most of the poems are addressed to women. Edouard Maynial says of these early efforts that 'they were "Correct, but somewhat artificial in enthusiasm," and adds : "The verses of this period did not give one any presentiment of the writer's nascent talents. Another

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

piece that was elaborated under the eyes of Bouilhet is a long oration in two hundred Alexandrine lines, which was recited at the Saint Charlemagne dinner at the Lycée. It has been reprinted, but seems unfindable. The school authorities to-day have no knowledge of it, nor of the Golden Book in which it is said to figure. Better known is his poem on "God the Creator," which is reprinted in a book, published in Rouen in 1892 by Augé and Borel, entitled: *Le Lycée de Rouen*, which gives the very interesting history of this school:

This includes a long chapter on "pupils who made their names," including Pierre Corneille, Fontenelle, Mesnager, Pradon, Armand Carrel (journalist, killed in a duel by Emile de Girardin, whose statue stands at the top of the rue Jeanne d'Arc), Flaubert, Bouilhet, Casimir Perier, Waddington, *e tutti quanti*. Maupassant, though at the time of the publication of this book his work had been accomplished and his pen been laid down for the last time, is summarily dismissed (possibly because, "*parmi les vivants*"—poor Guy) in very few and inaccurate words: "Amongst living pupils, we shall mention, pell-mell, Guy de Maupassant, the exquisite story-teller, disciple of Flaubert, a philosophy pupil in the scholastic year 1868-1869, *the only one that he spent at the school after his return from Yvetot.*" Maupassant's poem on God comes at the very end of the book.

The poem, such as it is, appears to have satisfied the school authorities to the extent of awarding to

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

Maupassant fourth place for French "dissertation" (or theme). As Dubosc points out, the fourth place was the best that Guy attained to in his school examinations that year. He was fourth in Latin composition and fourth in translation from Latin. He passed the baccalauréat examination, at which Zola, by the way, failed, but only with the mention "*passable*" (or "fairly good").

There do not seem to have been any scholars that year at Rouen Lycée who afterwards greatly distinguished themselves, except Guy de Maupassant. One of his friends in class was Jules Millevoye, brother of Lucien Millevoye, afterwards Boulangist deputy, from whom Guy perhaps caught the infection of uncompromising Anglophobia. Millevoye was closely associated with the lovely Maude Gonne, who waged pitiless war against everything British. Maupassant in his writings never lost an opportunity of sneering at the English, though one or two of his British characters, like Miss Harriet, and the Englishman in "*La Main*" are limned not without sympathy.

His life as a scholar at Rouen cannot, owing to family circumstances, have been a pleasant one. He somewhere describes "the lugubrious, fireless room" of a single man in Rouen lodgings. He appears to have run riot in the Suburra of the Norman capital and to have in those early years acquired much of the knowledge of women of the outcast class of whom he was later to write, which gives so great a verisimilitude to his stories. It is, however, a slander on

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

poor Adrienne Legay to say that Maupassant made her acquaintance in the Maison Tellier of the rue des Cordeliers and that she was the same woman who figures in that story as "rorty Rachel." Adrienne (Boule-de-Suif) never lived nor "worked" in any house of that kind.

His years in Rouen doubtless had much to do in other directions also in the formation of his literary character. It is a city of wonderful stimulus, this museum and storehouse of Gothic marvels. If on every side, the mediæval streets, the ancient houses might woo him to romanticism there was even more to be observed which would prompt him to criticism of the scheme of mundane things. Everywhere the shedders of blood, the heavy overlords are glorified, their deeds celebrated. The very names of the streets ring with civic slaughter or with foreign warfare. There is a rue du Massacre, and there is a rue de Rouge Mare. Duke Rollo has his thoroughfare and, of course, William the Conqueror also, and a dozen other men who carved their names with the point of a ruthless sword. The many reminders of the brave and gentle Joan of Arc which abound in the city, from the dungeon on the heights where the poor lass was threatened with torture, down to the slab in the market-place which marks the site where stood the pile and stake where she was put to death, the remembrance of her whom

*"Anglois brûlèrent à Rouen"*



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

would fire his patriotism and feed his resentment against the English. And the constant contemplation of the extraordinary wealth and power to which the Church had attained would suggest many an ironical thought to the observant youth, fresh from a hated life in a clerical training-school, where he had seen in the making the kind of men who officiated in the parishes round his home, the village curés, for whom he has so little good to say and whose alleged greed and duplicity, imposture and tyranny he so mercilessly exposes and scourges.

Unscrupulous greed is a trait which enters in most of his portrayals of priests. In *Une Vie* the worthless Julien de Lamare is introduced by the village clergyman as a suitable fiancé to Jeanne's family, though obviously the man's immoral character and other vices must have been known to his confessor. In other stories also a priest acts the unworthy part of entremetteur. In *Boule-de-Suif*, the conduct of the two nuns who are travelling by that diligence is by far the most odious of any. It is actually by the arguments of the elder religieuse that the wretched girl is finally induced to consent to the sacrifice. All the travellers have been trying to persuade the girl but in vain.

"Each one of them exerted himself to the utmost and without result to find new examples, when the countess, possibly without premeditation, but with a vague wish to do homage to Religion, questioned the elder of the two *bonnes soeurs* on the great deeds in the lives of the saints. Now, many saints had committed acts which would be crimes in our eyes; but the

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

Church absolves these criminal deeds, without any difficulty, when they have been committed for the glory of God, or for a neighbour's welfare. It was a powerful argument; the countess took advantage of it. Thereupon, by one of those tacit understandings, by one of those veiled compliances, wherein anyone who wears a clerical costume excels, or perhaps merely as the result of a sharp intellect, a stupid wish to be of assistance, the old nun brought up most powerful reinforcements to the side of the conspirators. She had been thought timid, she showed herself bold, verbose, violent. That was a woman who wasn't troubled by any gropings of casuistry; her creed was like a bar of iron; her faith had no hesitations; her conscience was devoid of scruples. She found Abraham's sacrifice the simplest of acts, for she would have killed her father and her mother immediately on a command from on high; and to her thinking nothing could be displeasing to the Lord when the intention was a praiseworthy one."

The *bonne soeur* is most eloquent on this subject and proves that the end justifies the means. She convinces Boule-de-Suif, where all the others have failed. And after the sacrifice, when the poor girl is crying from hunger and shame in the diligence, the two *bonnes soeurs* wrap up what remained of their garlic sausage, and apply themselves once more to their prayers.

In *Une Vie* again there is described the fanatical priest whose horror of all matters of sex prompts him to stamp to death a bitch and the puppies to which she is giving birth and to denounce to a husband an adulterous wife and her lover, so that murder results. In the story *Clair de Lune*, where again the fanatical priest figures, Maupassant for once lets loose the romanticism within him, and the beauty of a moonlit night calms the fury with which the curé had rushed

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

forth, bludgeon in hand, to come upon his niece and the man who was courting her. He sees in the wonderful beauty of the night the proof that God approves of love and courtship, or He would not set the stage in so beautiful a fashion.

In *La Petite Roque*, Maupassant indicates the gluttony of village priests where he says: "The curé had just come upon the scene; quite a young priest who had already grown fat." He walks off with a woman in great distress. "The mother's grief lessened under the sugary words of the cleric, who promised her a thousand compensations." The mayor calls out after them to invite the priest to lunch, an invitation readily accepted, though it would take him away from the woman he was to console.

In *Bel-Ami*, a young priest who saves a married woman from succumbing, for the time being, to the seduction of the hero is threatened by him.

"He was a young man, tall and rather fat, with plump and hanging cheeks . . . a handsome town *vicaire*, belonging to an opulent parish, accustomed to rich penitential women."

As the priest leaves the confessional, Bel Ami walks up to him, fixing him with his eyes, and snarls "into his nose":

"If you didn't wear a petticoat, you, what a pair of clouts you'd get on your ugly snout."

In *Le Père Amable*, a story in the *La Petite Roque* collection of tales, Maupassant expounds, without a single word of comment, the general opinion held

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

among the Norman peasants about their priests. Cæsar has come to the village curé to ask him to go and speak to Father Amable, who opposes his son's marriage with a girl who has an illegitimate child by another man. The father objects to "la veche avec le viau." He wants the curé to intervene.

"And what shall I tell him, your father?"

"Oh, well, the sort of things you say in your sermon when you want *sous*."

In the mind of the peasant religion's entire effort consisted in loosening purse-strings, in emptying men's pockets so as to fill the celestial chest. It was a sort of vast business undertaking, where the priests were the salesmen, sly, cunning, salesmen, up to snuff, who did good business for the good God at the expense of the countryfolk.

He was well aware that the priests rendered services, great services to the very poor, to sick people, to the dying, helped them, consoled them, advised them, sustained them, but all that in return for money, in exchange for white coins, for beautiful, shining silver with which one paid for the sacraments and the masses, the advice and the protection, the pardon of sins and the indulgences, according to the sinner's income and generosity.

### As to Father Amable

He was afraid of the curé by the apprehension of death which he felt approaching. He wasn't very afraid of the good God, nor of the devil, nor of purgatory, of whom he had no conception whatever, but he feared the priest who suggests burials to him, just as a man might fear doctors from horror of illnesses.

The curé succeeds in arranging for the marriage. In the end the old peasant hangs himself, unable to bear the sight of strangers eating food in his house.

## **THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE**

**Occasionally Maupassant depicts a noble character in a priest, but the majority of his writings are anti-clerical, which was one reason of their immense popularity in France, in revolt in those days against clerical preponderance.**

## CHAPTER IX

Holidays at Etretat—The Habit of Observation—Its Penalties—Maupassant's Love of Nature—Monsieur Esch on Maupassant's Pity—Artistic Callousness—Pierrot and the Marl-Pit—"Sport" at Etretat—Maupassant on Cats—Admission of Acts of Cruelty—Contradictions in His Character.

**H**IS holidays, during his schooldays at Rouen, were spent down at Etretat, where the out-of-door life was enjoyed to the full. This was a period of great value to the writer he afterwards became. His head was crammed with observations on the lives and characters of peasants and farmers and their women-folk, of sailors and fishermen, of noblemen and squireen. His memory was a large storehouse of anecdotes and sayings, to be used later. His inward eye registered hundreds of scenes, in the fields, in orchards, in farmyards, woods, downs, dunes, rocks, cliffs, at sea, on land, in the sky, that were afterwards to serve him so well.

In *Sur L'Eau*, later he was to describe this habit of constant observation as one of the reasons for which a writer should be pitied. He explains his theory at length, and concludes :

"When such a man writes, he cannot abstain from pouring into his books all that he has seen, all that he has grasped, all that he knows; and this, without making any exceptions for his relations, his friends, laying bare, with cruel impartiality, the hearts of those whom he loves, or whom he has loved, even exaggerating things so as to heighten the effect, taken up solely with his book and not in the least with his affections."

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

Of this characteristic innumerable examples amongst recent and contemporary writers suggest themselves to the student of literature. Who, for instance, could not put a name to such a writer as Maupassant describes in the phrase following the above passage: "And if he love, if he love a woman, he dissects her as a corpse is dissected in a hospital"? But it is curious that the one writer who admits this trade secret should be Guy de Maupassant, of whom it was said that the rule of his life was to hide it.\*

In this same volume, *Sur l'Eau*, which to many lovers of Maupassant will always appear as interesting as Rousseau's *Confessions*—in spite of his mother's saying that it was the first book in which he shows signs of incipient aberration, there is a fine passage describing his *animal* love for Nature. "I love the heavens, like a bird, the forests, like the wolf, the rocks, like the chamois, deep grass, as a horse loves it to roll in, and clear waters in which to swim, like a fish. I feel vibrating in me something common to every kind of animal some of all the instincts, of all the dim desires of the lower creation. I love the world as they do and not like you, men. I love it without admiring it, without poetizing it, without soaring to the empyrean. I love it with a love which

\* A trade secret which, however popular in the writing craft, has never been made use of by some of the great masters of English literature, as for instance, Jane Austen. As was truly remarked in a recent issue of *The Cornhill Magazine* (which also contained an absurd article about Guy de Maupassant): "Jane Austen never copied a character from a known person."—Mr Justice Mackinnon.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

is deep and bestial, which is contemptible and yet sacred. . . .”

During those holidays, when not galloping about on horseback or taking long swims in the sea, or cruising with the fishermen in their crazy smacks, he was shooting anything that offered itself to be shot at. He has described himself as passionately fond of shooting, of *la chasse*, everything about which delighted him, the fur and feathers flying, the gushing blood. One does not know whether he was sincere in this description of himself, for he has often pilloried, although not criticized nor blamed, cruelty to animals, and he is known to have been an animal-lover with certain reservations, but his description of a kind of “sport” that is practised at Etretat and was often indulged in by him, both during his holidays as a lad and afterwards when he had built himself a villa there, is pitiless and revolting. This description occurs in the story called *La Roche aux Guillemots* in the *Contes du Jour et de la Nuit* collection of tales. The story is about the shooting of these sea-fowl.

The sport which was enjoyed so much by Maupassant himself is described by him as follows :

“ There they are ”—(the guillemots)—“ motionless, waiting, not venturing to start off as yet. Some of them on the extreme edge of the cliff seemed to be sitting down, bottle-shaped, for their legs are so short that they look when they are walking, as though they were being rolled on wheels; and in order to fly away, being unable to take a spring off, have to let themselves drop like stones, almost down to the men who are stalking them. They know their own weakness and the danger to



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

which it exposes them and so don't quickly make up their minds to fly away.

"But the boatmen begin to halloo, beating the sides of their boats with slabs of wood, and the birds, frightened, hurl themselves, one by one, into the void, dashed down to the surface of the waves; then, with wings beating with rapid strokes, they fly and fly, and are getting out to sea, when a hail of leaden shot does not tumble them into the water.

"They are riddled thus for an hour, forcing them one after the other to clear out; and sometimes the females on the nests, implacably bent on brooding, do not leave, and receive, shot after shot, discharges of musketry which sprinkle the white path with tiny drops of pink blood, while the creature expires without having deserted her eggs."

These guillemots are rare birds. "They are not numerous. A hundred at the most, as though one single family had this tradition"—(of coming to nest on the rock at Etretat)—"and accomplished this annual pilgrimage."

In those days and for years afterwards pity had not awakened in Guy de Maupassant's heart. He claimed to be a pure animal; those who knew compared him to a prehistoric man. It was a part he was playing, without doubt, but for some years he identified himself with this rôle. It would have been a derogation to say one word of condemnation of the vile, unsportsmanlike massacre of the guillemots at Etretat, just as it would have been to moralize on any of the human turpitudes which he lays bare in his stories.

Monsieur M. Esch, who is a professor at Luxemburg and who has published a fine study on Maupassant, called "*En Relisant Maupassant*," deals with

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

his attitude towards animals in the following passage :

“ It is certain that his pity went out, above all else, to dumb animals, whose mysterious sufferings horrified him and raised his indignation much more than the sufferings of men. One will remember the story : *Pierrot*, the poor *quin* (Norman for chien, dog) whom his mistress, an abominable carcass of a woman, half-bourgeois, half-peasant, throws alive into a marl-pit, because she does not want to pay the dog-tax for him. There are there unforgettable pages on the dog's agony, pages as great as those in which he describes human tragedies. Suppose them to be written by Loti, or Daudet : the pity would be different, infinitely gentler, but would it be as concentrated, as strong? ”

One would like to be able to share Monsieur Esche's opinion and believe that, in writing *Pierrot*, Maupassant wished to move his readers' hearts with the sufferings of the little dog in the marl-pit abandoned to slow starvation with the prospect of being killed and devoured by the next big dog that was thrown into the pit for the same reason. It is, however, clear from the way in which the story is told that his object was to give another illustration of the sordid avarice of the Norman peasant woman, one of the favourite texts from which he was wont to preach. It is known that Maupassant loved dogs. It is recorded that the death by neglect of a sporting dog he had left in keeping at an inn at Bezons, his favourite boating resort, provoked a terrible outburst of passion and vengeance on his part and was the reason why he never could visit Bezons again. Certainly he paints in lurid colours the horrors of this “ *piquer du mas* ” as

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

suffered by unwanted dogs, and details mercilessly the various phases of their long death agonies, but these are but subsidiary details to the analysis of the hideous psychology of Pierrot's mistress. When she has decided to throw the dog into the pit, so as not to pay eight francs for a dog that does not even bark, she is at first inclined to have the cruel deed done by deputy. A roadmender asks fivepence for the job.

"That amount seemed madly exaggerated to Madame Lefèvre. The neighbour's farmservant offered to do it for twopence halfpenny, but that was still too much."

The woman and her maid decide that it will be kinder to Pierrot if they do it themselves. Pierrot is thrown in.

"At first they heard a dull thud; then a sharp cry, the shrill, heart-rending cry of a wounded animal, next a lot of little cries of pain, one after the other, then despairing appeals, the supplications of a dog imploring, with its head raised towards the mouth of the pit."

They were seized with remorse and ran away. In the night Madame Lefèvre is haunted by the cries of Pierrot, and has a nightmare in which he plays a part. She decides to have him brought up out of the pit. She goes to the man who works in the clay-pit. He wants four francs for the job. Madame Lefèvre screams with indignation at the price. The man says :

"You think I'm going to carry my ropes, my winches out there and set all that up, and go down with my lad and get myself bitten into the bargain by your cursed quin, for the pleasure of restoring it to you? You shouldn't have chucked it in."

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

All she can find to say it to gasp out "Four francs." So she tries to assuage her conscience by taking bread to the pit to throw it down to Pierrot, so that he won't die of hunger. But another and bigger dog has in the meanwhile been brought to "*piquer du mas*," and when they threw in a piece of bread,

"they could clearly distinguish the sounds of a terrible scuffle and then the plaintive cries of Pierrot, who had been bitten by the other dog, who was the stronger. It was all very well for them to specify: 'It's for you, Pierrot.' It was clear that Pierrot got nothing.

"The two women looked at each other in confusion; and Madame Lefèvre said in a vixenish voice: 'I can't, after all, feed all dogs that are thrown in there. We shall have to give up doing this.'

"And suffocating at the thought of all those dogs living at her expense, she went away, even taking with her the rest of the bread and eating it as she went along."

One's pity for poor Pierrot is entirely swamped in the flood of indignation that surges up in the heart at the contemplation of Madame Lefèvre.

So also in the story *Coco*, where a farmhand, to revenge himself on an old horse for whose neglect he has been scolded, starves it to death, although the miserable struggles of the victim are poignantly described, the reader's mind is concentrated, to the exclusion of anything else, on the biped brute. The biped brutes, again, in the story *L'Ane*, where two riverside rats fire volley after volley of small shot at a poor old donkey whom they find on the towing path, out of sheer delight in cruelty, claim attention and interest exclusively, and in the horror which they evoke

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

the pitiful victim is forgotten. In the same way in the old days it was the man standing in the pillory that attracted the eyes of the populace, which had little if any thought for the crime he might have committed.

Monsieur Esch in support of his criticism refers the reader to a fine passage in the book *Au Soleil*, where Maupassant describes the death of a camel abandoned by the caravan in the desert. He quotes :

“ So, having turned round long afterwards, I saw, still raised up out of the sand, the long neck of the deserted animal, watching, till the end should come, the slow disappearance over the horizon of the last living beings that it was ever to see.”

“ It’s short,” writes Esch, “ and discreet, but what rhythmic lamentations by Loti could ever equal this brevity and this concentration? ”

To which it might be answered that Maupassant was armed, that he was an expert shot and that, had the lonely agony of the dying *mahari* really distressed him, it was and had been from the first in his power to end its sufferings. Monsieur Esch writes that Maupassant’s “ apparent impassiveness is profoundly moving.” He, however, overlooks the fact that in this book Maupassant very often departs from this impassiveness and that there are several passages which might be quoted, in which he expresses his pity. For instance where a man hideously diseased presents himself at the French hospital and says that his disease was the “ work of God,” Maupassant discusses the “ poor devil’s ” case. He also speaks of “ our

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

poor little lizards on the Riviera." This is not impassiveness. There are other passages.

It is in his essay on cats, "*Sur Les Chats*" that Maupassant reveals his attitude towards animals. This essay was written in the winter that he spent at the Cap d'Antibes at a villa taken for his mother, Villa Mutterse. There was here a fine cat which belonged to the concierge of the villa, and Maupassant used to play with it every day. It was a cat with some Persian strain in it and was white with dark grey patches and with big yellow eyes. It looked on Maupassant as a friend and a playmate. François, the valet, relates: "This cat used to have endless games with my master on the bench in the garden. She had seemed wretched when we first came, but appeared quickly to understand that she had found a friend. And so she used to come regularly every day to the trysting-place and never grew tired of these jolly romps. Her yellow eyes were full of intelligence. It was this cat that gave my master the idea of writing an article on cats."

This article: *Sur les Chats* is included in the volume which takes its title from the story: *La Petite Roque*. Maupassant introduces the cat that François speaks about, but describes it as white, with green eyes, and relates how it came and jumped on his lap while he was reading in the garden at the Villa Mutterse. He tells how it sought his caresses, and how they both "got on each other's nerves."

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

"For," he writes, "I love and I detest these charming and perfidious animals. I take pleasure in touching them, . . . Nothing is softer, nothing gives one's skin a more delicate, a more refined, a rarer sensation than the warm and vibrating fur of a cat. But this living fur robe puts in my fingers a strange and ferocious longing to strangle the animal which I am caressing. I feel within her the wish she has to bite and tear my flesh. I feel this wish and I take it, like a fluid passing from her to me. This wish, this longing, creeps up my fingers from their tips which are plunged in this warm fur, it rises along my nerves, along my limbs up to my head, up to my heart, it fills me, runs along the surface of my skin, causes me to grit my teeth.

"Should the cat begin, should she bite me, should she scratch me," he continues, "I seize her by the neck, whirl her round and fling her far away, like a stone hurled from a sling, so quickly and so brutally that she never has the time to revenge herself.

"I remember that, being a child, I already loved cats with these sudden longings to strangle them with my little hands; and that one day, at the end of the garden, at the entrance to the wood, I suddenly saw something grey that was rolling itself over and over in the tall grass. I went up to have a look. It was a cat taken in a snare, strangling, choking, dying. It writhed about, it tore the earth with its claws, it leaped up in the air, fell back inert, then began again, and its hoarse, quick breathing made a noise like a pump, a horrible noise that I still can hear.

"I could have taken a spade and have cut the cord of the snare, I could have gone for a servant or have told my father. No, I did not stir, and, with my heart beating, I watched it die with a shuddering and cruel delight; it was a cat. Had it been a dog, I would sooner have cut the copper wire with my teeth than have allowed it to suffer one second longer. And when it was dead, stone dead, I went up to it to feel it and to pull its tail."

This confession did not get much credence, at least it was never quoted against Maupassant by his enemies, of whom, as a successful man, he had many.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

Possibly it was thought that here once more he was indulging in his favourite pastime of "pulling people's legs." But who would deliberately tell such a story about himself, unless it were true? It is also to be noticed that when he wrote this *chronique* at the Villa Mutterse, his mother was living with him, and that he was in the habit of discussing all his writings with her and of reading over to her for her approval all that he had written. Indeed, François testifies to the fact that Maupassant admitted owing much to her advice. One day when he had been talking over a story in the garden with Madame de Maupassant, and she had suggested something, he was heard to exclaim: "Ah, now the story lights on its feet like the gardener's cat." Madame de Maupassant would have *Sur Les Chats* read to her and no doubt remembered the incident of the cat strangling itself in the garden in Les Verguies, for otherwise she would never have allowed Guy to send out such a story about himself, or she would have insisted on its being told in such a way as to show that it was mere fiction. This contribution to the *Figaro* was not, however, supposed to be fiction; it was a *chronique*, article or essay in which imagination had no scope.

At the same time Maupassant was never known to have ever ill-treated a single one of the many cats he had as pets, and he was never without a cat or cats at home. François writes about his master's pets and tells how he cherished them.

That the impassiveness shown in his story about the



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

foul "sport" at the Roche aux Guillemots proceeded not from artistic restraint, but from sheer indifference towards the victims where amusement and successful marksmanship were at stake, is clearly shown by Maupassant in the sketch which serves as introduction to his collection of tales called *Contes de la Bécasse*. This book, in the opinion of many, contains some of the finest and most characteristic of Maupassant's stories. In this volume are found *Ce Cochon de Morin*, *Pierrot*, *Les Sabots*, *Le Testament*, *Aux Champs*, *Un Fils*, and the inimitable *Aventure de Walter Schnaffs*, to mention only some of this collection of masterpieces. These stories are supposed to be told in turn by the guests at a French château after the day's shooting, though they have nothing to do with sport. The introduction describes the host and the arrangement by which his guests contributed each a story for after-dinner amusement. Maupassant never writes so as to expose his own class, the country gentleman of title. He endows them in his stories with great amateness, but that from his pen is a compliment and not a criticism. It is accordingly patent that he finds no fault with the gentleman who figures in this introduction, the Baron des Ravots, "who for forty years had been the king among the sportsmen in his province. . . . He was a man of agreeable manners and there was in him much of the lettered wit of the last century."

Baron des Ravots is paralyzed in both legs, and all the sport he can indulge in is thus described :

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

"On sunny days he had his big armchair, which was like a bed, rolled out in front of the door. One manservant standing behind him carried the guns, loaded them and handed them to his master; another valet, hidden in a shrubbery, released a pigeon from time to time, at irregular intervals, so that the baron should be taken unawares and so kept himself on the alert.

"And from morning till night he used to shoot the swift birds, greatly upset if he missed one by surprise, and laughing till the tears came into his eyes when the bird fell down perpendicularly or, in falling, did some tumbling of an unexpected and funny nature. He used at such times to turn round towards the footman who was loading his guns and ask him, suffocating with laughter :

" 'Got it, didn't he, Joseph, that fellow! Did you see how he was brought down?'

"And Joseph invariably used to answer :

" 'Oh! Monsieur le Baron never misses them.' "

In his book: *Au Soleil*, Maupassant tells an unpleasant story of his own cruelty to animals. It is in the chapter entitled: *Le Zar'ez*. He has been awakened in his tent by something cold touching his face. It "was a monstrous toad, one of those fantastic, white toads that one sees in the desert." He continues :

"In revenge, I made him smoke a cigarette. As a result he died. This is how one proceeds. You force open the narrow mouth and you insert one end of the roll of tobacco wrapped up in the thin leaf of paper. Then you put a light to the other end. The animal, suffocating, blows with all his might so as to get rid of this instrument of torture, then willy-nilly, he is obliged to take breath again. Then he blows again; swollen, expiring and comical; and he has got to go on smoking till the end unless you take pity on him. He usually dies suffocated and as big as a balloon."

On the other hand there is a passage in one of Mau-

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

passant's sporting stories which describes how the affection of a teal drake for its mate kept it hovering over her dead body and so affording an easy mark for the shooter's gun. It is told with pathos and admiration. The difficulty in forming any real estimate of Guy de Maupassant's character, is that, more than most men, he presents the most striking contradictions. The same man who coldly describes the killing of the desert-toad shows bowels of compassion for the bird that would not desert his mate. Maupassant, who in his story, *L'Ane*, details hideous cruelty to a donkey with utter indifference, has, in *Mont-Oriol*, a passage of striking beauty and tenderness on the corpse of a dead ass, lying in the road within three paces of the green pastures for which it had longed in vain during its long life of starvation and misery.

## CHAPTER X

Second-Best in a Fight—Reading for the Law—Maupassant's Litigiousness—His Enforced Idleness—The Outbreak of the War—Maupassant's Part in It—Biographical Errors—His Own Account—Maupassant as an Anti-Militarist—His War Stories—How Time Modified His Views.

**W**HEN Guy de Maupassant left school, he was a powerful young man, whom his friends often compared to a Brittany bull, and he was always ready to pit himself physically against anyone, peasant or boatman, who might wish to pick a quarrel with him. He almost invariably came off best in these encounters, though he admitted that on one occasion at Etretat he was going to get beaten, when reinforcements arrived and the fight was stopped. This fight was with a country *goujat*, or farmhand, who saw him kicking another farmhand, who was tamely submitting to the punishment. So the *goujat* went to the *goujat's* help and began to pummel Guy de Maupassant. Guy, as usual, fought well, but was no match for the herculean farmhand and would have come off badly had not other villagers, arriving on the scene, put a stop to the fight. It then transpired that the man who had been kicked had been paid by Guy to let himself be kicked. Those were the days when the "human document" rubbish used to be talked about, and Guy was anxious to see *de visu* how a man who was being kicked looked and comported himself. He did not mind talking of this

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

occasion, one of the very rare ones on which he came off second-best.

After he had taken his bachelor's degree and left school, Maupassant decided to read law and to prepare himself for the legal profession. This is nowhere chronicled by those who have written about him, but the fact is recorded in a letter which is reproduced further on, a letter unearthed in the archives of the Ministries by Monsieur de Monzie, the Minister, for the purpose of his masterly study on Guy de Maupassant as a Government official.

Maupassant had certainly the Norman characteristic of litigiousness, which has made the legal profession so prosperous in England and Normandy and so heavy an overlord. Well may the Palace of Justice in Rouen be, next to the Cathedral, the finest building in that city of wonderful buildings, while the monstrous-sized Law Courts in London, to say nothing of the enormous wealth amassed by the gentlemen of *la chicane*, show that in crossing the channel the Normans took their litigiousness with them. In later life Maupassant was to show himself not only an inveterate *plaideur*, and indeed a man fond of litigation, but of no little skill in directing his agents as to the process to be followed. His censer-bearers have been at pains to describe his litigiousness towards the end of his career as but one of the many indices of the fell disease that was at work, not only on his physique but on his brain; but for this suggestion there is no pathological basis, otherwise Bedlam



PORTRAIT OF JULES DE MAUPASSANT, GUY'S GRANDFATHER.  
(By courtesy of M. Henri Defontaine.)



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

would be full and the Temple empty. It is a well-known fact about Maupassant that he was a very keen man of business, a master in the art of drawing up agreements. Catulle Mendès said of him: "In the matter of contracts with editors and publishers, Maupassant is the master of all of us." Poor, enthusiastic Victor Havard, his first publisher, would have had much to say on this point and will be quoted later. Maupassant had the insatiable acquisitiveness of the Normans and their ferocity of defence and preservation of the thing acquired.

Having taken his degree of *bachelier ès lettres*, on July 27th, 1869, Maupassant had decided to study law. It is not apparent whether he had taken any steps to secure his admission to the University for this purpose, but it is almost certain that he had not been able to do so. The nearest law-school being at the University of Paris, he would have been obliged to go up to Paris to live as a student, and for this funds were altogether lacking. His father was at that time working as a clerk in a stockbroker's office, and, according to his own account, was existing on £40 a year. His grandfather had lost all his money. Madame de Maupassant, whose income of £200 a year had been much reduced by the extravagance of her husband, and who had besides to nurse her second son, Hervé, who was often ailing and in need of medical treatment, was in no position to make Guy even the minimum allowance on which he could have lived as a student in Paris, which may be fixed at 125



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

francs a month (£5). This monthly sum, Maupassant seems to have considered, would have been sufficient for him to live, pay his fees and buy his books, for later on when he applied for Government employment he stated that it was his hope, while zealously performing his duties in the Ministry to which he might be appointed, to be able to continue his legal course at the Ecole du Droit in Paris. There is no record of how the year between his taking his degree and the outbreak of the war was spent. Doubtless in much the same way as his holidays had been spent at Etretat, to which he now returned from Rouen: taking violent exercise of every kind, playing practical jokes, courting the farm lasses and the demi-mondaines of the fashionable seaside resort and writing innumerable verses. At the same time he would be adding to the stores of observation of Norman life and Norman scenes on which later he was to draw with such prodigality.

War having been declared against Prussia, "Maupassant," writes Edouard Maynial, "was torn from this fruitful vagabondage and furnished with new subjects of observation." Maynial goes on to say that Guy enlisted and served in the campaign. So he did, but not in the way implied by Maynial and by all the other people who have written about him. Gabriel Clauzet states that Maupassant "took the field as a mobile." The mobiles it may be remembered were a corps, created in 1868, suppressed in 1871, formed of young men who were not included in the active

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

army, but liable to be called up to the colours. It was a body of these men whom Maupassant so ridiculed in his story: *L'Aventure de Walter Schnaffs*. Maynial states that "the opening pages of *Boule de Suif* contain the description of the little corps d'armée in which Maupassant was taking part in the campaign as a mobile." His reference to the corps is of the briefest. He mentions that amongst the routed soldiers were "little alert *moblots*, readily scared and promptly enthusiastic, as ready to attack as to run away." Maynial's theory about *Boule de Suif* is that it was during this retreat that Maupassant saw the girl and collected the incident at the inn at Tôtes. But as Tôtes was then in the hands of the Prussians, it is certain that Maupassant being a soldier was not there, for a very excellent and sufficient reason.

Maupassant himself, in the letter unearthed by Monsieur de Monzié, supplies the real facts about his part in the campaign. This is what he wrote to the Minister of Marine, on February 20th, 1872:

"When the war against Prussia broke out, I was beginning my studies of law. Called to the flags as a soldier of the 1870 class, I passed, at Vincennes, the necessary examinations to be admitted into the *Intendance militaire*" (stores, commissariat, clothing, etc.—non-combatant). "I was then sent to the second division at Rouen and remained attached to the offices of the divisionary Intendance until the month of September, 1871, when I procured myself a substitute (*je me suis fait remplacer*)."

People who do not like Maupassant, and whose jealousy of his brief and brilliant career has not been

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

assuaged by his most evil fate, are pleased to refer to the fact that during the war he was "Embusqué" in a non-combatant service. As a matter of fact he spent all his time after leaving Rouen, at Havre, whither the Intendance for the second division moved after the Prussian approach to Rouen and long before its invasion in the spring of 1871. That he did not seek to take an active part in the campaign can be explained in several ways other than as malice prompts. The war was considered by many Frenchmen, not as a national war but as the foolhardy undertaking of the pseudo-Bonaparte, Napoleon III. Maupassant, under the influence of his grandfather, Jules de Maupassant, who had always been in opposition to the Empire, would have little or no enthusiasm for this campaign. His personal courage, the pleasure he would have taken personally in the great adventure, in the wild excitement of the war, need not be doubted for one second. He did not like this war. He did not like the Bonapartes, and he detested war on principle. Maupassant was a great pacifist by instinct and deduction.

In *Sur l'Eau* may be read a long passage (pp. 68-78) which is one of the most violent diatribes against War and Militarism that has even been penned. It should be remembered that when Maupassant wrote and published *Sur l'Eau*, he was famous and that he risked his popularity by expressing such sentiments. When he went mad, however, his pacificism was one of the first things he jettisoned. A perfectly fictitious

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

account he made of how the Mediterranean squadron had saluted him when he paid a visit to the *Amiral-Duperré* gave some of his friends their first alarm, and François relates that on the evening of the day after the one on which he attempted suicide and his madness was patent, he roused himself from his bed to say suddenly to him, with feverish excitement: "François, are you ready? We must be off. War has been declared." François continues:

"I answered him that we hadn't to start till the next morning. 'What,' he cried out, stupefied by my opposition. 'What, is it you who want to delay our departure, when it is of the extremest importance to act with the greatest speed? You know it has always been understood between us that we should march together for la revanche. And you know well that we must have la revanche at any price and that have it we will.'"

The passage is a long one, too long to be quoted in full. It may be noted, however, that in one passage he pillories Napoleon. It is, as a whole, one of the most vehement attacks on militarism that exists in the French language.

He went further than merely to attack militarism. In some of his stories his irony seems to shoulder his patriotism away. In the *Adventure of Walter Schnaffs* he succeeds in making the Prussian invader sympathetic, while he ridicules the national guards who made him a prisoner. Doubtless this story is but the relation of something that actually occurred, doubtless the absurd communiqué written out after the "engagement" by the fat colonel is a document

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

that existed, doubtless the home-bringing of the captured forces, represented by the exultant Schnaffs, is accurately described, but what a weapon this tale, published world-wide, gave the Germans for their propaganda! And in this story there is only ridicule for the French, but what about the many stories in which, to pillory the cruelty and treachery of the Norman peasants, he describes deliberate acts of murder committed upon German soldiers quartered in Normandy farmhouses and cottages, stories in which, to heighten the atrocity of the deed, the victims are depicted as quiet, inoffensive, familiar men, to whom the reader's sympathy goes out, invaders though they be? Such are the stories: *Saint Antoine* (Contes de la Bécasse), *La Mère Sauvage*, and *Le Père Milon*. The last of these is written with such skill that the reader understands how, after the old peasant's appalling confession of a series of sixteen most treacherous murders committed on isolated German horsemen, the very officers of the Prussian drumhead court-martial who have listened to it inclined to mercy and would have spared his life but for . . . let Maupassant describe it:

"Then the colonel rose, and, going up to Father Milon, whispered to him:

" 'Listen, old man, there's perhaps a means of saving your life, that is to . . . .'

"But the old codger didn't listen, and, fixing his gaze full on the conquering officer, while the wind played with the stray hairs on his skull, made a hideous grimace, which shrivelled up his thin face all lacerated by the sabre wound; and, swelling out his chest, spat with all his strength in the Prussian's face."

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

One cannot help admiring the "gueux magnanime," as Maupassant calls him, but here again the Prussians seem to play the nobler rôle. In *Saint Antoine* there is no question as to which, murderer or victim, Anthony or his "pig," the reader's sympathy goes. These stories and others have been widely circulated in Germany and must have been in the minds of many of the invaders in the last war, which may explain some of the atrocious acts these invaders perpetrated, possibly to anticipate and prevent such treatment as Maupassant had described. Not that his war stories are all intended to show the horror of war by the crimes with which it inspires his own countrymen, for there are those like *Mademoiselle Fifi* and that magnificent tale of the simple heroism of two Parisian shopkeepers, *Deux Amis* in the *Mademoiselle Fifi* collection, or *La Folle* in the *Contes de la Bécasse*, in which German barbarism is pilloried, which almost make even a neutral rejoice when reading the stories telling of the reprisals practised by the barbarism of the countrymen of the victims. Maupassant is a pacifist; he detests war and all its works; he has not a tinge of the warrior in him; and with his pen he scourges impartially the cruel, tyrannical, lustful invader, and the treacherous, revengeful peasant. These stories are not inventions, they are all narratives of things that occurred and that were reported to him, no doubt by soldiers who visited the offices of the *Intendance* in Rouen or in Havre, and which were seized upon by him to illustrate his convictions that

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

war arouses and fosters in man of every nationality the vilest passions, prompting to the vilest deeds. From the point of view of humanity it was fairer thus; from the point of view of patriotism it was perhaps indiscreet.

Of course the simple reason why Maupassant did not take a part in the actual fighting was that when war broke out he was untrained, that the war lasted only a short time and that one does not turn out a soldier in a few weeks. Otherwise nobody remembering his great personal courage, his utter indifference to danger and death and his wonderful physique, can imagine that he lay *embusqué* at Havre from choice. It is the conviction of those who knew him that, had he been spared and lived till 1914, though then he would have been sixty-four years of age, his broad chest would have been placed from the first between his beloved France and the German bayonets.

Towards the end of his life—that is to say, in 1891—he gave in the unfinished novel, *L'Angelus*, into which he had put all his pity and all his heart, the novel that the great, strong man could not read to his friends without choking with emotion, some impressions of the invasion of Rouen by the Prussians. He no longer depicted these with sympathy. This he enlists in the fullest degree for their victims. It may be that in the writing of *L'Angelus*, there developed within him the resolution expressed when he summoned his servant to arm and follow him.

## CHAPTER XI

Maupassant Leaves the Army—Applies For a Government Post—Pulling The Strings—Guy's Official Application—Twenty-Three Shillings a Week—Law Studies Abandoned—Guy on His Work and Pay—The Good Apprentice—Flaubert's Pronouncement—Authorship Dimly Forecasted—Guy Gets Promotion.

**A**FTER peace had been declared, Maupassant, who was faced with the absolute necessity of earning his living, took advantage of the provisions of the military law (abolished in 1905) by which a conscript could have himself replaced in the army by a man who had drawn a high number in the *tirage au sort* lottery and who was willing to serve in his place for the consideration of a money payment. These transactions used to be carried out through an agent, who was popularly styled (or rather, stigmatized): *un marchand d'hommes*, and who took a heavy commission on the sum paid, the average amount of which was about £30. This sum would be found for Guy by Madame de Maupassant, who was living in much reduced circumstances at Etretat. It was here Guy joined her as soon as he had been liberated from the army by his *remplaçant*, and it was from here that a few weeks later—namely, on January 7th, 1872—acting on the suggestion of his father, who was anxious that he should obtain some Government employment, he wrote an application to the Minister of Marine. "I am bachelor of letters," he wrote,



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

“and at the outbreak of the war I entered the offices of the Intendance militaire, where I was employed till the month of November, 1871, when I had myself replaced.” This letter still exists in the archives of the French Admiralty. It is endorsed: “There is no vacancy—Jan. 16th.” Two days later Guy was informed by a letter to Etretat that his application had failed.

Gustave de Maupassant did not, however, allow this rebuff to discourage him from further efforts on his son's behalf, and these very efforts to obtain the miserable post that was all that could possibly be hoped for show how urgent was the need of the Maupassant family. He had friends at the Admiralty, a Monsieur Faure, a *chef de bureau* and a *sous-chef* of the staff department, and he was also able to put an admiral, Admiral Saisset, into the field on his son's behalf. Admiral Saisset was to present a fresh application from Guy, on whose capacities his father insisted, to the Minister personally. Ladies, too, were to be enlisted in the same cause, a Madame de Comberty and a Madame de l'Arbre. Guy was instructed to write a fresh letter to the Minister and to make it “official and pressing.” He accordingly wrote the following application, which was sent to his father to be laid before the Minister by his protectors:

“Etretat, 20th Feb., 1872.

“Monsieur the Minister:

“I have the honour to come and solicit from your Excellency a favour which will be to me of great value, that of being attached to the Ministry of Marine.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

"After having finished my studies at the Lycée of Rouen, I was admitted bachelor of letters on July 27th, 1869.

"When the war broke out against Prussia, I was beginning my study of law. Called to the colours as a soldier of the 1870 class, I passed at Vincennes the examinations necessary for admission to the *Intendance militaire*. I was then sent to the second division at Rouen and remained attached to the bureaux of the divisionary intendance until the month of September 1871, when I caused myself to be replaced.

"The grace that I come to ask of your Excellency will be all the more precious to me, that it will allow me, I hope, to continue my studies of law, abruptly interrupted by the war, in Paris. This will not prevent me from fulfilling with zeal and punctuality the duties that may be laid upon me.

"I have the honour to be, with profound respect, of your Excellency, the very humble and very obedient servant,

"GUY DE MAUPASSANT."

This letter was sent to Count de Pardieu, who was helping Gustave de Maupassant in his effort for his son, and in the covering letter the Count is asked to see that Admiral Saisset hands this "petition" to the Minister direct, and to beg him to back up his other protectors with all his power (underlined). He adds: "It is a big and important matter for Guy's future and I recommend him most particularly, to your kindness. A good many people have been dismissed from the Admiralty and I see there are vacancies which will be filled up in a month or two, which will have to be filled; let's try to put Guy in a position to profit by this circumstance by getting him attached to the Ministry as soon as possible." He adds that the head of the staff department, M. Charles Duplessis, is a "personal friend and is also interested in his son." And all this in the hopes of securing an

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

appointment worth 23/- a week! It shows how desperate was the Maupassants' need; it shows the poverty from which Guy started, and it enhances vastly the credit that belongs to him in wresting success and material prosperity for himself and those dear to him by the sheer use of his innate talents, trained by himself under the guidance of a master, applied with judgment, and only brought to market when every auspice was favourable.

For an answer to his letter of the 20th February, Maupassant had to wait a full month. It was not until March 20th that Admiral Saisset was informed by the chief of the staff that his *protégé* "was authorized to come and work in the offices of the central administration." He had not even an appointment as supernumerary, and was provisionally attached to the library of the Ministry. His pay would be less than 23/- a week, and insufficient to exist upon in Paris, even in those days. Such as it was, the post had been created for him by special favour. It reminds one of the employment found for Thomas Pinch by old Martin Chuzzlewit. Guy remained librarian's assistant until October of that year, when one of the supernumeraries having been promoted to the place of a fourth-class clerk at the Colonial Office, he was given his post and shortly afterwards was employed under his father's friend, M. Charles Duplessis. In the meanwhile his father had recruited a fresh protector, Admiral Fourichon, who allied himself with Admiral Saisset on Guy's



Guy de Maupassant, né à Fécamp en 1850,  
mort à Paris, le 6 juillet 1893.

PORTRAIT OF MAUPASSANT, REPRESENTING HIM AS  
BORN AT FÉCAMP.

(See French text below picture )



PORTRAIT OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT, AT AGE OF THIRTY-ONE,  
WHEN HIS LITERARY CAREER BEGAN.  
(By courtesy of M. Henri Defontaine.)



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

behalf. The Minister seems to have been unable to resist this naval demonstration, and on January 25th of the following year, 1873, Guy received his official nomination as "*delegate to the chef de bureau of the interior service at the stores of printed matter.*" If anyone ought to be able to explain what this office meant, it should be Monsieur de Monzie, who has held several portfolios at different Ministries in the past years. But Monsieur de Monzie himself is in doubt as to what might be the functions of such a "delegate." "If," he writes, "I understand the object of this delegation rightly, it implies the almost commercial supervision of the supplies sent in each day from the National Printing Works to the Ministry of Marine." The salary attached to this post was 1500 francs a year, which was the equivalent in those days of 23/- a week.

Monsieur Maynial refers to this appointment in the following terms, which are far from describing the actual facts :—"In order to live in Paris, Maupassant had accepted a post at the Ministry of Marine, with a salary of 1500 francs a year." Monsieur Maynial's fault seems to proceed from a wish to represent Guy de Maupassant as by birth and fortune, a person of some importance. This no doubt from affection towards and deference to the poor, great, unhappy man. But surely it is infinitely more to his credit that, starting from such a humble position, he was able within ten years of his appointment to the ambiguous post of *délegué*, or checking-clerk in a warehouse, to make

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

himself a man of European celebrity, rich, courted, envied, hated, admired. European celebrity? Cosmopolitan rather, let it be said. Maupassant has been for years, for nearly half-a-century one of the most widely read writers of the day.

As supernumerary—Maupassant, by the way, was the last supernumerary at the French Admiralty, the post being abolished after him—could not consider himself definitely attached to the Ministry, and it was not till more than a year later, namely, on March 24th, 1874, that he actually entered the Civil Service, as a clerk of the fourth-class at the Admiralty. His salary was increased by £4 per annum, so he was receiving 1600 francs a year. The pay as supernumerary had started from February 1st of the preceding year. Twelve months after his appointment to the clerkship, Maupassant's salary was about 27/6 a week. M. de Monzie, in recording these pitiful figures, expresses surprise that the nephew of Alfred Le Poitevin, so badly trained for confinement in an office, so delicately and freely brought up, should have accepted such a post with joy. He also asks: "Why, besides, did Guy's father show himself so anxious and in such a hurry to get his son a berth in a Government office, a job that was more than mediocre and less than remunerative? Was it parsimony, or, better still, Norman prudence on the part of a father, who himself had been lacking in prudence and in method?" I fancy that when M. de Monzie wrote this he had not read the revelations on the state of the Maupassant

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

finances, and especially those of Gustave de Maupassant, which were revealed in the correspondence published in 1905 by Baron de Lumbroso. Until the true facts then came out, people thought Maupassant had joined the Civil Service as a dilettante, for the sake of a position which might lead him to high honours, that he was a young man of fortune and lofty connections. The brutal fact was that he was faced with the absolute necessity of earning his daily bread, that his parents could do nothing for him. Had these facts been known at the time of his success, less rancour might have been engendered against him, and possibly even Goncourt's tongue and pen might have spared him.

The projected study of the law to be pursued simultaneously with Government work was not heard of nor spoken of again after Guy had come up to Paris. Doubtless he found that with 23/- a week it was not possible for him to afford even the moderate expense that would have been involved by joining the *Ecole de Droit*, and further that after he was free of the office, he had little time for anything but recreation and that violent physical exercise which was an absolute necessity for him. One thing is certain, and that is that when he came to live in Paris nothing was further from his thoughts and hopes than to make a literary career for himself. His efforts in literature had so far been confined to versification, and it was as an aspiring poet that by his mother's request he placed himself almost from the first under the guidance of



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

Gustave Flaubert, who was then living in Paris. As M. de Monzie writes : " What is quite certain is that nobody in the family had considered for Guy de Maupassant a literary fortune, prompt and self-sufficing." " Life isn't easy for people of taste," grumbled Flaubert in his letters to Madame de Maupassant. " In spite of that your son must be encouraged in the taste he has for verses, because it is a noble passion, because literature consoles one for a host of misfortunes, and because, who knows, he may in the future perhaps have some talent." It was certainly not on a pronouncement of this sceptical nature from an authority of Flaubert's experience and standing in things literary that either Guy, or his mother, for all that she may have stated afterwards, would base any hopes or plans for the future connected with the craft of authorship. Guy himself later stated that he eventually took to literature " as a means of enfranchisement " (from the drudgery and indigence of a Government office), and not from any special attraction to that craft, and added that by the same methods of training and work, he could have succeeded equally well in any other art, as, for instance, painting.\*

In the meanwhile he applied himself with zeal and diligence to the tedious duties of checking-clerk, handing out forms as applied for from the various departments, and, as M. de Monzie discovered in the

\* He often spoke with contempt of his craft as a writer. In *Amitié Amoureuse*, the authoress quotes Maupassant as exclaiming : " Why, it's better than stealing," when someone asked him why, as he found authorship so difficult and exhausting, he wrote at all.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

Admiralty books, gave full satisfaction to his superiors. "The notes on him were excellent. 'This young man,' writes the rear-admiral who was head of the staff, 'has drawn attention to himself by his intelligence, his zeal and his exemplary conduct.' "

"This young man," however, at heart, was far from being satisfied with his position. Later on, when he came to write, he frequently referred to the squalid conditions of his life at that time and for years afterwards. In a striking passage in *Sur l'Eau*—a book, by the way, of which Madame de Maupassant afterwards said that it was the first of Guy's writings which gave her reason to doubt his sanity—he thus describes his life at the age of twenty and after :

"Employés of gloomy lawyers' offices, employés in the big Government offices, you must read each morning over the door of your sinister prison Dante's celebrated phrase :

" ' Abandon all hope, ye who enter.' "

"One enters there, for the first time, at the age of twenty, to remain till the age of sixty and more, and during this long period nothing happens. One's whole existence passes away in the gloomy little office, always the same, with its walls lined with green cardboard dispatch-boxes. You go in as a young man, when hopes are lusty. You leave it when you are old, near to death. All that harvest of remembrances that we garner in during a lifetime, those unforeseen events, loves sweet or tragic, adventurous journeys, all the hazards of a life of freedom, are unknown to these galley-slaves.

"All the days, the weeks, the months, the seasons, the years are alike. You arrive there at the same hour; you lunch at the same hour, at the same hour you leave the office, and that goes on from the age of twenty till that of sixty. Four events alone mark a date : marriage, the birth of one's first child; the

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

death of one's father and of one's mother. Nothing else—Oh, I beg pardon, there are the promotions, the steps upward. You know nothing of everyday existence, nothing about the world. You don't even know of the joyful sunlit days in the streets, of vagabondage in the open country, for you are never let loose before the hour fixed by the regulations. You surrender yourself prisoner at eight o'clock in the morning; the prison opens at six o'clock when night is falling. But as a compensation, you certainly have the right—a right which has been much discussed and bargained about, and, for the matter of that, reproached you—of staying shut up in your lodgings for a fortnight every year. For where could you go without any money?

"The carpenter climbs heavenwards, the cabman prowls through the streets; the engine-driver rushes through forests and plains and mountains, comes and goes unceasingly from the walls of the town to the broad, blue horizon of the seas. The clerk never leaves his office, the coffin of this living being; and in the same little mirror, in which he has looked at himself as a young man with his fair moustache, on the day of his arrival, he contemplates himself, bald with a white beard, on the day when he is shown the door. Then it is finished, life is closed, the future shut off. How can it be possible that one has already reached that point? How has one been able to grow old when not a single event has happened, when not a single one of life's surprises has ever stirred one? That is so, however. Room for the young, for the young clerks!

"Then, off one goes, still more wretched, and one dies almost at once by this abrupt breaking-off of the long and persistent habit of daily office attendance, of the same movements, the same acts, the same duties at the same hours to which one has been accustomed."

Elsewhere in many passages throughout his books he writes of the miserable poverty of the Government clerk and refers specially to the salary which was his after he received his appointment. In the opening pages of *Bel-Ami* he gives an insight into the kind of life that a man could lead in Paris on that salary.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

George Duroy is a clerk in the offices of the Northern railway, with a salary of 1500 francs a year. He lives in a miserable little room at the top of a workman's tenement and lunches at a *prix fixe* restaurant for one franc and a penny and dines for thirty sous. Towards the end of the month he is usually obliged to content himself with one meal a day, and by economy makes this at noon, so as to have a few *sous* over for a supper of bread and sausage at threepence. He has no pleasures, except an occasional single glass of beer at a café on the boulevards, where in those days one could buy a bock for thirty centimes with ten centimes for the waiter. If he lets his thirst induce him to take a second glass of beer, he has to do without his supper next night, "and he knew them only too well, those famishing hours towards the end of the month."

In *A Cheval* (from the *Mademoiselle Fifi* collection), a quotation from which M. de Monzie puts at the head of his study on Maupassant, he describes his own life in the introductory passages about Hector de Gribelin, the Government clerk, who has the wretched adventure described in this tale:

"Hector de Gribelin had been brought up in the country, in the paternal manor house by an old abbé-tutor. They weren't rich, but they managed to exist and keep up appearances.

"Then, at the age of twenty, they had looked for a situation for him, and he had entered the Ministry of Marine, as a clerk at a salary of fifteen hundred francs a year. He had run on to this rock like all those who are not prepared from an early age for the stern fight for existence, like all those who see life athwart a cloud, who are ignorant of ways and means and of the opposition they will meet with, in whom from childhood

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

special aptitudes have not been developed, nor a savage energy for the struggle, like all those into whose hand neither tool nor weapon has been placed.

"His first three years of office life were horrible."

In *Souvenir*, in *Contes du Jour et de la Nuit*, which is noticeable because it is one of the very few tales in which Maupassant makes a slip,\* he says :

"I was twenty-five at the time. I had just arrived in Paris; I was a clerk in a Government office, and Sundays appeared to me like extraordinary fêtes, full of exuberant happiness, for all that nothing wonderful ever happened on them. It's Sunday every day nowadays with me. But I regret the time when I had only one a week. How grand it was! I had six francs to spend!"

The story, *Mouche*, which is one of the *L'Inutile Beauté* collection, in which he describes his life on the Seine as an oarsman, begins :

"I was a clerk without a penny : to-day I am a man who has succeeded and who can throw away big sums for the caprice of a moment."

He hated the life, he despised his fellow-clerks and his superiors, and later pilloried them in a score of stories. He revolted against his poverty and left the service as soon as ever it was prudent to do so. But nevertheless, it is not true that he was a careless

\*The slip is that this clerk who has only six francs to spend takes a lady, whom he meets by chance during his outing, to a restaurant at Bougival, engages a private room, and treats her to dinner and champagne! As another instance of Maupassant's very rare carelessness, may be quoted the passage in *Bel-Ami*, where Duroy finds a Louis d'or in the case of his watch! Put there, unknown to him, as a stud-fee, by Madame de Marelle.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

employé, who neglected his work for his versification and played truant on the river as often as he dared to do so. He was, on the contrary, a model civil servant, the very good apprentice of the fable. He applied to his distasteful task the zeal and punctuality which he had promised the Minister in his letter of application. His first application for leave of absence, dated July 18th, 1876, gives the proof of the assiduity of his attendance. "I have been at the Admiralty," he writes, "for more than four years and as yet have not had one leave of absence." This application was granted with full pay during his congé. It may be noted that he was still employed as warehouseman or something similar, for his letter is signed with the following designation after his name: "Fourth-class clerk in the stores department—Bureau of General Supplies." At the age of twenty-six, therefore, the future author of *Une Vie* and a score of other masterpieces is employed all day, from 8 a.m. till 6 p.m., at a wage never exceeding 30/- a week, in checking forms and handing out printed matter and stationery as applied for by clerks from the various departments. As regards his remuneration, his pay was raised from 1500 to 1800 francs in 1875, and in 1876 it was further increased to 2100 francs, which would give him a weekly income of 32/6, and that only after the intervention of a Colonel de la Salle.

## CHAPTER XII

Maupassant and Flaubert—Their Seven Years of Friendship—  
Flaubert's Early Opinion on Guy—Flaubert's Conversation—His Correspondence—Contrast With his Writings—  
Maupassant's Purity of Language—Guy as an Apprentice to Letters—Flaubert's Methods—A Famous Letter of Advice.

**A**LTHOUGH Laure de Maupassant, very naturally, too, poor lady, claimed later that she had always intended Guy to become a writer, it is evident from her own letters that at the time that he joined the civil service, and for some time afterwards, she had no thought that his talents might develop in any profitable literary direction. She imagined that he had a gift for versification and was anxious that this gift should not be neglected, for though she fully agreed with Theodore de Banville that "poetry does not feed its man," it would always be a good thing for Guy's social advancement to be known as a poet approved of by the masters. With this in mind she counselled Guy not to neglect Gustave Flaubert, who was then living, when in Paris, in a small flat in the rue Murillo, and she begged Flaubert as her old friend to guide the youth and help him with his advice. Guy goes every Sunday to see Flaubert and to show him his verses, and as to these visits his mother writes to Flaubert :

"Guy is so happy to go to you every Sunday, to be kept there by you for long hours, to be treated with that familiarity

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

which is so sweet and so flattering, that all his letters say and repeat the same thing. The dear boy tells me of his life day by day, he speaks of those of his friends whom he has found in Paris and of the amusements that come his way; then, unfailingly, the chapter ends thus: 'But the house which attracts me most, the house where I enjoy myself more than anywhere else, the house that I keep going back to unceasingly, is Monsieur Flaubert's house. . . .'

"You know what confidence I have in you; I shall believe what you believe and I will follow your advice. If you say Yes, we will encourage the good lad to follow the road he seems to prefer" (the writing of poetry), "but if you say, No, we'll send him to make wigs . . . or something like that. . . . So speak frankly to your old friend."

In a letter written some time later, Flaubert speaks to Madame de Maupassant of her son:

"Your son does right to love me, for I feel real friendship for him. He is witty, lettered, charming, and then he's your son, he's the nephew of my poor Alfred."

Four months later, namely, on February 23rd, 1873, Flaubert has got to know and appreciate Guy better, and writes to his mother:

"For more than a month, I have been wanting to write to you to tell you of the tenderness I feel for your son. You can't believe how charming, intelligent, what a good fellow, how sensible and witty, in short (to use a word which is fashionable just now) how sympathetic I find him. In spite of the difference in our ages, I look upon him as 'a friend' and besides he reminds me so much of my poor Alfred. I am even sometimes scared by it, especially when he bows his head when he is reciting poetry."

He is not enthusiastic about the writing craft, and says:



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

"The age I live in and life weigh down horribly on my shoulders. I am so disgusted with everything and especially with militant literature, that I have given up publishing anything. These are evil days for people of taste to live in. In spite of that your son must be encouraged in his taste for poetry. . . . Up till now, he has not produced enough for me to allow myself to draw up his poetical horoscope, and then again who has any right to decide on a man's future."

He misunderstands the good apprentice, who was so appreciated by his office superiors, and says :

"I think our young fellow is a bit of a loafer and only middlingly keen on work. I should like to see him undertake a long book, rottenly bad as it might turn out to be. What he has shown me is well worth all that is being printed by the Parnassians. As time goes on, he will gain in originality, he will get a personal way of seeing and feeling (and that is everything); as to what comes of it, success, what does it matter? The chief thing in this world is to maintain one's soul in a lofty region, far from the bourgeois and democratic mud and mire. The cultivation of Art gives one pride, of which one never has enough." (Hear ! Hear !—R.H.S.)

Gradually Guy seems to have shown Flaubert that there were the makings of a writer in him, and the "good giant" sets himself seriously to work to train the young man, who by then had decided that literature was to be the means by which he was to liberate himself from the life of indigent drudgery which he loathed. He puts himself entirely in Flaubert's hands, he seats himself at the master's feet and decides not to attempt to strike out for himself until he has learned everything that the great man can teach him. Few young men of twenty-four, whose verses have been applauded, would thus resign themselves to tute-

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

lage and obscurity, but then few young men have the surprising fortune to be befriended by a Gustave Flaubert. Maupassant's modesty was to have its great reward.

"Maupassant's education by Flaubert," writes M. Albert Thibaudet in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, "perhaps unique in our literary history, places us in the wholesome atmosphere of a studio in the Renaissance, of a Leonardo who comes from a Verrochio or of a Giulio Romano who is born of a Raphael."

Maupassant has left on record, in his study of Gustave Flaubert, as also in many reported conversations, an account of his "initiations" in the flat at the rue Murillo and in the cottage at Croisset. He speaks of his master as "implacable." Nothing but perfection satisfied Flaubert, and it was only after seven years' labour with his pupil that—it was very shortly before his death—he admitted that in something Maupassant had written, perfection had been reached. But even that did not satisfy him, for he writes to him: "Do a dozen stories like this one and you will be somebody."

If strong and repeated doses of Pascal's philosophy do not placate Puritanical readers of Maupassant towards a frequent choice of his subjects, some of the blame should, in justice, be reserved for his master. They were subjects from which in his conversation and letters Flaubert never seemed able to keep away. In one of his letters, written in January, 1880, in which he speaks at length about *Boule-de-Swif*, reproduced

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

further down, he asks him, apropos of the breeding of peacocks : " You who are (or, better still, who have been) a countryman, have you seen these birds mating? " He adds : " I think that certain parts of my chapter will be lacking in chastity. There is a lad there who has very nasty morals, and one of my characters petitions for the opening of a *maison de tolérance* in his village." This is but one of a hundred quotations which might be adduced to show Flaubert's influence in this direction. Flaubert's letters, which have been published in four volumes, have been printed with as many asterisks and dashes to veil words which are too coarse for the French reader as there are in the printed poems of Rochester or Sedley. This perfect master of style, whose language in his several masterpieces never offends by a suggestion of coarseness, used in his conversation and epistolary writings a vocabulary before which that of Zola and the naturalists whom he (Flaubert) so despised pales into insignificance. It would be much to Maupassant's credit that, being fed on such talk for a period of seven years, he never anywhere in any of his writings makes one slip in the direction of vulgarity. There is not a bad word, nor a coarse expression, to be found in all his large output. The nearest he gets to an ugly neologism is in the occasional use of the words "*gueuler*," "*engueuler*," "*engueulade*" (to holloa, to scold, a scolding : all from the word *gueule*, the mouth of an animal, from which comes the heraldic *gules*). But there is proof that Flaubert was ever

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

putting him on his guard against any lapses into vulgarity of diction. In the letter in which he tells Maupassant that *Boule-de-Suif* is a masterpiece, he adds that he has only two corrections to suggest, the first as to the ridicule that Maupassant in the opening paragraphs heaps upon the retreating French soldiers, and the second as to the use of the word *tetons* in the description of Boule-de-Suif's physique. Maupassant, who in those days wished to stand forth as anti-patriotic, disregarded Flaubert's advice as to the first revision and let his anti-military comments remain, but he removed the word *tetons*, which is quite good French for breasts, and substituted the word *gorge* for it. Flaubert gives no reason for wishing this word to be altered. Maupassant would understand; it was liable to shock the ear of the hypersensitive philologist, and it was the ear of such a one that he had been trained always to consider in his choice of words. It is interesting to contrast Flaubert's hypercritical prudery over the work of his "beloved disciple" (as he calls him in more than one letter) with his enthusiasm, expressed in a letter to Emile Zola, written a few days later, over the book *Nana*, the pages of which are simply pockmarked with coarse and even obscene words. "I passed all day yesterday," he writes, "till half-past eleven at night, reading *Nana*, and the result was I didn't sleep all night and remain quite stunned and stupid." He even approves of the coarseness of the vocabulary, for he says: "If I had to note down everything precious and

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

strong which I find in it, I should have to make a commentary on every single page. The characters are marvellously life-like. The death of Nana at the end is Michel-Angelesque. Naturalistic words abound. An enormous book, my good fellow." He reverts to the vocabulary, but not to blame. "Now, that you might have been more sparing of coarse words is quite possible; that your description of the table d'hôte of the tribades 'revolts every sense of decency,' I quite believe. Very well, and what then?—for *les imbéciles*! In any case it's new, and most courageously done." Zola might pepper his pages with obscene words, Maupassant must not even use one word, though a dictionary word, which in one combination, "*teton de Venus*," is used to designate a delightful kind of peach, because it seemed to the master to have a slight tinge of vulgarity. But then Maupassant was Flaubert's pupil and Zola was not, and Flaubert projected to make of his "beloved disciple" what Zola, he held, would never become, one of the masters of the French language.

On the whole Maupassant most obediently followed Flaubert's recommendations. A striking example of the way in which he surrendered his judgment to that of the older man is afforded by the poem *Désirs*, which is to be found in his volume of poems called *Des Vers*. This poem had been submitted in its original form to Flaubert, who in one of the last letters he wrote to Maupassant said:

Envoi d'Amour  
dans le jardin des Enlervi

Arcoires, petit enfant dont j'adore la mere  
Qui pour te voir jouer sur ce banc vient s'asseoir,  
Fais avec les cheveux qu'on rêve à la chimère  
Et qu'on disait blonds aux étoiles du soir.  
Viens là, petit enfant, donne ta lèvre rose,  
Donne tes grands yeux bleus et tes cheveux frisés,  
Je leur ferai porter un fardeau de baisers.  
Afin que, retourné près d'elle à la nuit close,  
Quand tes bras sur son cou viendront se refermer,  
Elle trouve à ta lèvre et sur ta chevelure  
quelque chose d'ardent aussi qu'une brûlure,  
quelque chose de doux comme un besoin d'aimer.  
Alors elle dira, frissonnante et troublée  
Par cet appel d'amour dont son cœur se défend,  
Preuant tous mes baisers sur ta tête bouclée,  
— "Qu'est-ce que je t'en donne au front de mon enfant?"



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

"And now, let us chat about *Désirs*. Very well, my fine young fellow, I don't like the said piece at all. It shows a deplorable facility."

He attacks the first line, which in the original began: *Un de mes chers désirs*, and says: "'A desire that is dear!' '*Avoir des ailes*,' parbleu, that wish is common enough. The two next lines are good, but in the fourth you speak of 'birds taken by surprise,' who are not taken by surprise at all, because you are pursuing them, unless by '*surpris*' you mean 'astonished.'

"'I would, I would.' With such a turn of phrase you might go on forever, as long as your ink lasted. And composition, what about it?"

And so the letter goes on, pulling the poem to pieces. One line he finds charming, but adds that it is too reminiscent of a line by Ménard. He describes the combination "*affolante bataille*" as "atrocious," and his conclusion is: "Upon the whole I advise you to suppress this poem. It is not up to the standard of the others. Whereupon, your old pal embraces you. Severe but just."

Maupassant did not obey this last injunction, for the poem was included in the volume *Des Vers*, but he very carefully went over it with Flaubert's letter in his mind. The first line was changed to

*"Le rêve pour les uns serait d'avoir des ailes"*

and the *oiseaux surpris* in the fourth line made way for *les cieux assombris*. The "*Je voudrais*" remained



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

and is even repeated three times, and the line that Flaubert suggested was inspired by Ménard was not effaced, but the "*affolante bataille*" which Flaubert found atrocious has disappeared, and so has a comparison to a "big torch" which the master had ridiculed. There are not many poets of thirty years of age who would show such docility, especially at the behest of a man who, admitted to be a master of prose, had no particular authority to speak on prosody.

In an article by Maupassant published in the *Echo de Paris* on November 23rd, the day of the inauguration of the Flaubert memorial at Rouen, he wrote: "Gustave Flaubert was dominated during the whole of his existence by a single passion and by two loves; this passion was for French prose; one of these loves was for his mother, the other was for books."

There are records by eye-witnesses of the way in which Flaubert trained Maupassant for writing prose, the elimination of unnecessary adjectives, the pitiless suppression of superlatives. He would roar out his injunctions at his pupil. Then as to observation, the collection of material, he has been heard to say: "Go a walk, my lad, look about you and tell me in a hundred lines what you have seen." Or he would specify: "Walk along until you see a concierge doing something outside his lodge, watch him, and then write out all you have noticed." The effect of this training may specially be noticed in those pieces of Maupassant's work which may be classed as journalism. There has recently been republished, in the volume

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

entitled *Misti*, an article in which Maupassant describes a voyage he took in the balloon *La Horla*, which as a piece of "special correspondence" surpasses by a long way any accounts of balloon ascensions that one remembers to have read. Maupassant noticed and records things during this flight that are not referred to by other balloonists. Here for the first time one learns that the one sound that above all others reaches the sky-farers from the earth is the quacking of ducks. One learns that the very slightest jettison, as of a few drops of water, or a pinch of sand, or a single chicken bone, or a piece of newspaper sends the balloon soaring upwards. And so on: details which could only have been garnered by one trained to acute observation, to the notice of the merest minutiae. It is with this observation and with this notice that he was able to attain in his stories to such verisimilitude in his descriptions.

Monsieur Edouard Maynial may be quoted in connection with Maupassant's training by Gustave Flaubert:

"Flaubert used to correct the manuscript notes of the young man as though he had been a schoolmaster correcting a school-boy's exercises. He cut out, ruthlessly, all unnecessary epithets, remodelled the cadence of a sentence 'and got angry when two consecutive sentences had the same construction and the same rhythm.' Maupassant never got discouraged, but used to carry back to his office the notes covered with scratchings-out and prepared with greater care the fresh attempt which on the Sunday following he was to submit to the master once more.

"For the rest, by his very nature and by his previous education, Maupassant was in a complete state of preparation for receiving Flaubert's lessons. In both these writers, men

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

of the same race and of the same temperament, there was an inclination, common to both of them, to consider life as specially designed for the purposes of art; the artist is to document himself by observing nature and man in his immediate vicinity, he is always to endeavour to discover new combinations of these two elements, and his investigation will never be a barren one, because these combinations are inexhaustible. . . A precise detail therefore takes in a novel, a place of enormous importance, and the effect produced will be all the more powerful according as this detail, by its very insignificance and often by its triteness, is more true to life, more close to average fact. Such is the method that Flaubert inculcated to Maupassant, by his teaching and by his example."

Flaubert did not limit his teachings to matters literary. He took a paternal interest in the young man, of whom he grew so fond that in the last days of his life he used to address him in his letters as "*mon chéri*" (my darling). Maupassant often wrote to him complaining of the monotony and drudgery of his life at the Admiralty. Here is an extract from one of these letters to Flaubert :

"Add to that my work in this government office gets on my nerves, that I am unable to work, that my brain is barren and exhausted by the addition sums that I am doing from morning till night and that at times there come to me such clean-cut perceptions of the uselessness of everything, of the unconscious maliciousness of creation, of the emptiness of the future (whatever it may be), that I feel myself growing sorrowfully indifferent to everything. Like St. Anthony, 'I say every evening : 'Another day has passed by. One more day gone.' They seem to me, my days, long and sad, between an idiot fellow-clerk and a chief who rows me (*engueule*). I don't speak to the former and I have given up answering the latter. Both of them despise me a little and consider me unintelligent, which is somewhat of a consolation to me."

Flaubert's manner of answering querulous letters

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

of this sort is exemplified in his oft-quoted letter from Croisset, dated July 15th, 1878. It is a long letter, the following passages of which refer to Maupassant's complaints :

" You complain about women, that they are monotonous. There is a very simple remedy for this and that is not to make any use of them. You say : " Events have no variety." That is a realist complaint and besides what do you know about it? You have only got to scrutinize them more closely. Have you ever really believed in the existence of things, isn't everything mere illusion? There is nothing true but the way in which objects are perceived by us. " Vices are petty," but everything is petty. " There are not enough ways of turning a phrase." Seek and you shall find.

" Well, now, my friend you seem to be thoroughly upset (*embêté* is the word Flaubert uses) and your trouble afflicts me because you might be spending your time more pleasantly. You *must*—do you hear me, young man?—you **MUST** work more than you are doing. I am beginning to suspect you of being slightly idle. Too many w---- " (in the French the word begins with a *p*); " too much boating. Yes, sir. Too much exercise. The civilized man does not require so much locomotion as Messrs. the medical men would have us believe. You were born to write poetry. Write it. ' All the rest is emptiness,' you say. Yes, beginning with your pleasures and your health; get that into your noddle. Besides that your health would be all the better if you follow your vocation. . . . You live in a hell of ———. I know and I sympathise with you and pity you from the bottom of my heart. But from 5 p.m. until 10 a.m. the whole of your time could be consecrated to the Muse, who after all is the best, old bitch. Come, come, my dear fellow, lift up your nose! What use is there in digging deeper and deeper into your sadness? You have got to look upon yourself as a man of strength, that's the way to become one. A little more pride, God's truth (*saperlotte*). The lad was pluckier." (Flaubert always speaks of Alfred Le Poittevin, Maupassant's uncle, as " the lad ".) " What you lack are ' principles.' It's all very well to deny it, one must have principles, the question being what principles. For an

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

artist there is one and one only, to sacrifice everything to one's art. Life ought to be considered by him as a means, nothing further and the very first person he shouldn't give a damn for is himself.

"What is becoming of The Rustic Venus and the novel, your plot for which delighted me?"

## CHAPTER XIII

The Great Distress—Portrait by Léon Fontaine—Guy's Secretiveness—An Attack on Zola—Flaubert and *Boule-de-Suif*—Guy's Poverty—Further Promotion—His Love of the Seine—*Bonjour, Confrère*—Guy as an Oarsman—Another Portrait—Guy's Early Humour—The Amazing Transformation—The Physiological Theory.

THOSE who remember Maupassant as he was between the years 1871 and 1880 will wonder whether possibly he was not practising towards Flaubert, possibly to excuse himself for slackness in his tasks, that schoolboy malingering which he had found profitable at Etretat. Was he not "pulling Flaubert's leg," incorrigible practical joker that he was? Or were the gaiety and exuberance of spirits, which he showed to others, the mask, and the truth that which he unbosomed to his friend and master? It is a fact that in 1876 or thereabouts the Great Distress that was to make his passing so very evil did come into his life, and would justify all his sorrow and despair; but he certainly did not let others see "the snake gnawing at his heart," as Heine says. One of his earliest friends, M. Léon Fontaine, who is the "Petit-Bleu" of the boating story, *Mouche*, and who was his constant companion during the period referred to, says of him: "Those who only knew Guy de Maupassant towards the end of his life haven't the slightest conception of his temperament and character as they really were. Gloom had settled on his temper.

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

... From 1871 to 1880, he was the jolliest and best of good fellows. He was as free from care and as turbulent as a child; he loved big practical jokes and violent exercise in which a man's physical strength comes into play. With him one did not have the feeling of being with a literary man who only lives on his nerves and on his brain. Personally I could never think of him as a man of letters until much later, when he had become famous."

Maupassant was of a secretive nature, another Norman quality which he may have imbibed with Normandy air and Normandy cider, and practised almost to excess his principle: Hide thy Life. One would have thought that such a friend as Flaubert might have been taken into his fullest confidence, but this was not done. *Boule-de-Suif* was already in proof and Flaubert knew nothing of the projected *Soirées de Médan* in which it was to appear, nothing of the other stories. This is shown by his letter of January 2nd, 1880, in which he writes:

"May 1880 rest lightly upon you, my much beloved disciple. Above all else no more palpitations of the heart, good health for the dear mother; a good plot for a play which shall be well written and bring you in one hundred thousand francs. My wishes concerning your ——— will only come last as Nature attends to that sort of thing herself.

"Why, what's all this? So you are going to publish a volume? A volume of poetry, of course, but according to your letter that story about Rouen is to form part of it? And then you speak of 'our' proofs. Who are the *we* in question?

"I have a great desire to see the anti-patriotic lucubration you speak of. It would have to be very, very strong to upset me."

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT.

Possibly Maupassant hesitated about letting Flaubert know that he was contributing to a volume in which Zola was to be the principal writer and "Zola's tail" the other contributors. Both Flaubert and he professed that the words "realism," "naturalism" and other slogans of the Zola school had no significance whatever for them, and while Flaubert expressed the greatest admiration for Zola's books, Maupassant had recently written to Flaubert severely criticizing Zola's formulae and pretensions. "What do you say about Zola?" he asks. "As for me, I consider him quite mad. Have you read his article on contemporary poets, and his pamphlet, *La République et la Littérature*? 'The public shall be naturalistic or not be at all.' 'As for me, I am but a savant.'!!! (Only that, what modesty!) 'The enquiry into social conditions'—the human document—the series of formulas.—We shall soon be seeing on the backs of books: 'Great Novel According to the Naturalistic Formula.'"

Having written thus in 1879, he may have been reluctant a month or two later to inform Flaubert that he was collaborating with this very Zola in a joint volume, to which all Zola's acknowledged disciples were also to contribute. Flaubert died in May, 1880. He read *Boule-de-Suif* first in proof and suggested two corrections. It delighted him largely because his disciple showed in his descriptions how well he had learned the lesson on observation, which Flaubert had drummed into him and which Mau-



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

passant formulates in his preface to *Pierre et Jean* :

“ The thing is to look at anything that one wants to describe long and closely enough to discover in it an aspect which nobody else has seen or reported. There is the unexplored in everything because we are accustomed to use our eyes with the remembrance of what people before us have thought about the thing we are contemplating. The smallest thing contains something that is not known.”

One sufficient reason for Maupassant's depression was his extreme poverty. Even in 1880, when his salary had been raised more than once, his financial position was known to be so bad that Flaubert, asking him to come down to Rouen to lunch with a number of friends : Zola, Daudet, Goncourt and the publisher, Charpentier, says : “ If you haven't the money to pay for your ticket, I have a splendid double louis at your service. To refuse it from motives of delicacy would be a low-down trick on me.”

Two or three years previously Maupassant wrote to his mother to express his delight that his brother Hervé had been made a *sous-officier*, as that “ would completely transform his regimental life.” This shows that neither he nor Madame de Maupassant had been able to contribute even a few *sous* to Hervé's purse, for the comfort of the young man for whom they would have made any sacrifice, as Guy afterwards proved.

He was a clerk at the Admiralty for over three years, at a salary of £72 a year. In 1876 his *chef de*

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

*bureau* recommends him for promotion and communicates the following notes about him :

"Somewhat delicate health in spite of his robust appearance." (It is quite possible that Maupassant had been malingerer here also.) "Capacities fairly satisfactory. Manner of using these capacities, ditto. He is an intelligent employé who keeps himself informed on the requirements of his service. Is animated by the desire to do well and makes himself useful. M. de Maupassant has been for three years on a salary of 1800 francs a year. It is fitting that he should not be left any longer with so small a rate of pay. I therefore ask for him to be put up one class which would bring his salary up to 2100 francs (£84). Proposals: I propose him for a post as third-class clerk with a salary of 2100 francs. Nov. 24th, 1876."

It was thanks to his robust health and iron muscles and his love of athletic exercise in general, and of boating in particular, that Maupassant was enabled, in spite of his abject poverty, to extract a great amount of pleasure and excitement from his life in Paris. Instead of having a room in some wretched Latin Quarter or Montmartre furnished house, he had a bed down at some place near the Seine. Hither he used to hurry as soon as he was released from his office and spend every waking moment on the river.

"I was a penniless clerk," he writes in the introductory passages of *Mouche*. . . . "I had at heart a thousand modest desires which were unrealisable but which gilded my existence with all kinds of imaginary expectations. . . . How simple, how good, how difficult it was to live thus, between the office in Paris and the river at Argenteuil! My great, my only, my absorbing passion, during ten years, was the Seine. Ah! the beautiful, the calm, the varied and the stinking river, full of mirages and of filth. I loved it so much, I think because it gave me, as it seems to me, a sense of life."

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

This tale, *Mouche*, was written in 1890. The manuscript bears not a single erasure or correction. He had carried the story in his head for fifteen years and had elaborated mentally every sentence. The writing of it took him only three hours. It gives an account of his life in those days, of his friends, his boat and his amusements.

His *chef de bureau* might well say of him that he was of robust appearance. He was that so much that it is recorded that one day in a riverside inn where he was sitting with friends a Herculean wrestler from a neighbouring fair greeted him with a "Bonjour, confrère." Henri Roujon, a friend, described him as he was in those boating days, in an article of *Souvenirs* which was published in *La Grande Revue* in 1904. From these souvenirs, as well as from articles written by Paul Alexis, Charles Lapierre and Robert Pinchon, M. Edouard Maynial draws us the following picture of the Government clerk "whose health was rather delicate":

"Everybody who frequented Maupassant's society in the years between 1871 and 1880 remembered him as a jolly fellow, sly, energetic, hearty, who loved country life, adored the roistering feasts of the villages, loved boating and the playing of practical jokes. 'There was nothing romantic about his appearance,' writes Henri Roujon. The round flushed face of a freshwater sailor, free and easy carriage and simple manners. . . . We readily believe that sleeplessness, dyspepsia and certain nerve-troubles contribute to a writer's dignity. Maupassant, the Maupassant of those days, had not in the least the appearance of a neuropath. His complexion and his skin looked like those of a countryman beaten by the sea-winds. His voice had retained the drawl of rustic talking.



PORTRAIT OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT.



RUE DES CORDELIERS IN ROUEN, AN EVIL STREET IN THE  
 NORMAN SUBURRA, WHERE MAUPASSANT HEARD  
 STORY OF "LA MAISON TELLIER."



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

He dreamed of nothing but of races in the open air, of sport and boating on Sundays. He would not live anywhere else than on the banks of the Seine. Every morning he used to get up at daybreak, washed his boat, rowed or sailed, while smoking his pipe until it was time, as late as possible, to jump into a train to go to labour and grouse in his official prison. He drank hard, he ate like four men and slept like a top—and the rest in keeping.”

It is recorded of him that more than once he walked fifty miles at a stretch, and that he rowed his boat, with a couple of friends as passengers, from Paris to Rouen. He often used to say that to feel the boat respond to the sweep of his oars was the keenest pleasure in life.

Innumerable are the “ farces ” or practical jokes he used to play in those days. One of the best remembered was a trick that, with the connivance of his friends, he played one summer evening on his fellow-travellers in the train from Chatou, people of the class the Americans call “ commuters,” people returning to the city from their suburban villas, Stock Exchange men and solid *rentiers*. At that time the papers were full of the doings of the Nihilists, their plots and their outrages. In a packed carriage, Maupassant, who had a small wooden box on his knees, pretended to be in great trepidation, kept glancing at the package in his lap, from which proceeded an ominous ticking, and whispering to his friends, whispering, loud enough to be heard, the most Red of doctrines, issuing mysterious orders with what was doubtless a strong Russian accent, orders which referred to bombs, dynamite, infernal machines and so forth. When the

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

train reached Paris, Maupassant and his friends were pounced upon by the gendarmes; a commissary of police was sent for in posthaste to examine the prisoners.

Formal and correct in his garb at the Ministry, Maupassant presented a wild Bohemian appearance down on the river. He used to meet his friends, at whatever station the appointment for the day on the river had been made, Sartrouville, Bezons, or Argenteuil, "with the remnants of a straw hat forming a halo round his head, his chest covered with a striped jersey and his brawny oarsman's arms bare to the armpits." His language was in keeping. Jettisoned the cold, dignified reserve of the bureaucrat at the Marine, "he used to greet his friends with jolly shouts of welcome, often worded in a very immodest parlance, which he took good care to shout out so that any big swell with a decoration, or bourgeois family out for a picnic might hear him." Here one thinks Flaubert was at fault, because he was always abusing the *bourgeois* and he revelled in the coarse words and allusions which the French refer to, not without patriotic pride, as *gauloiseries*. Maupassant was like this in his younger days. Then, when all were embarked on his yawl, while rowing or manœuvring the sails, he used "to tell, untiringly, bawdy stories, with not a detail omitted, or give descriptions of coarse, practical jokes which he had played, accompanying the narrative with such convulsions of laughter that the boat was rocked nigh to the point of swamping.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

At that time Maupassant and his four friends, who had bought their boat in partnership and had christened it by the suggestive name of *La Feuille à l'Envers* (The Other side of the Figleaf), were living in a common dormitory at a pothouse in Argenteuil, an "*affreuse gargote*" he calls it. Here "the beds were detestable," and the food "most mediocre," but he states that here "he spent the wildest, happiest evenings" in the whole of his life.

There has recently come to light a letter which Maupassant wrote to his cousin, Louis Le Poittevin. It refers to the legacy of some articles left by a certain Apollone Lelieux, and is quoted as showing Maupassant's love of fun and high spirits in 1875, which is the year before he began to complain about his health. It is dated February 20th.

"My dear Louis,

"As it was impossible for me to leave my office long enough to go where you asked me to go, for to go to Neuilly would have taken me at least half a day, I asked Robert Pinchon, alias La Tôque, alias Thermometer, alias C. Centigrade, alias Reamur to be so good as to see to this business.

"Accordingly, Thursday last he set out light-heartedly and goes and knocks at the house of M. Appolone Lelieux.

"He finds the heirs drinking and singing.

"He explains what he has come for.

"This damps their jollity, they become sad and point out to him that it will be very difficult to remove the articles of the legacy without a furniture van. La Tôque full of a noble pride, asserts that he will carry it all away himself and soon finds himself seated, his heart heavy but not as heavy as his burden, on a bench in the Avenue de Neuilly, with the following objects the value of which I estimate as follows :

(Here in the letter are four caricatures, one of which, of a woman, was drawn by Guy de Maupassant.)



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

### ESTIMATE :

One old crocodile measuring 2 metres 50c from his first hollow tooth to the tip of his tail - - - - -	Fr.0.50
An old gun which the heirs added to the gift because they were afraid lest it might be loaded - - - - -	1.50
The spinal marrow of a red herring - -	0.10
A kangaroo's comb - - - - -	0.05
A bone of a swordfish - - - - -	0.10
Arrows poisoned by being brought into con- tact with the crocodile - - - - -	0.05
An old walking-stick. Nil - - - - -	0.00
An axe, bought as an antiquity, but left by will after being assured that it was totally without value. Weight of the bronze -	0.05
Total -	Fr.2.35

Robert La Tôque having been obliged to take a cab ( <i>sapin</i> ) to bring back all the above- named horrors, claims : Cabfare for a cab taken outside the fortifications - -	Fr.2.50
Luggage - - - - -	0.50
Total -	Fr.3.00

"What's to be done about all this? I shan't be able to go to Rouen for a month and the carriage and packing (for you would need a crate) would end up by leaving you a considerable balance on the wrong side.

"As an act of grace they threw in M. Appolone's Swan Song. Here it is :

When he felt himself getting hoarse  
Daddy Apollone being as great a roué  
As old Arouet,  
Said to himself : No more thread on the spinning wheel,  
For I know that people don't get cured of old age,  
Already of the hearse they are greasing the wheel and  
I shall have to go and stand sentry  
In the sombre sentry-box. I leave as legacies

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

Both my old crocodile and my kangaroo and  
My gun, an *objet d'art* where there is  
A very old souvenir, a wheel-lock duck-gun  
My horrible saw—a roué's punishment, alas!  
To Louis Le Poittevin.

And he expired.

May thy enemies do the same.

Adieu my dear Louis . . . Tout à toi.

JOSEPH PRUNIER.

In the French verses, Maupassant shows some skill in finding rhymes for *roué*, thus *enroué* (hoarse), Arouet (Voltaire), *rouet* (spinning wheel), *roue et* (wheel and), *kangarou et* (kangaroo and), *art où est* (art where is), and so on. The rhyming of *guérite* *ah! je*, with *guérit d'âge* and *héritage* is also skilful. In the second long verse, which is omitted above, the rhymes with equal facility are on *vin* and *celle*.

This letter shows high spirits and address in writing prose and verse, but the humour of it—essentially bureaucratic, even stodgy and elephantine, which would pass for wit in a society of dull Government clerks—does not faintly suggest the power to provoke smiles and laughter which so few years later Maupassant was to reveal. He was a master of laughter, not the laughter of jollity, no doubt, but that laughter to which Beaumarchais's hero hastened so as not to weep. It is not credible that many people have read *En Famille*, who have not at least smiled when the little girl announces that "Grandma, grandma grandma is dressing. She's going to come down." Most readers will have roared with laughter not only

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

over *En Famille*, but a score of other stories, such as *Le Petit Fût*, *Le Vieux*, *Le Diable* and *Au Printemps*, because the discomfiture of others is what most easily provokes laughter. Maupassant would have felt that he had failed in such stories if laughter had not been produced, a tribute to his insight into the baseness and turpitude of mankind.

The above letter has been reproduced so that a comparison of Maupassant's literary quality, humour and so forth, in those days and his productions but very few years afterwards, may establish the fact that in that short period an entire transformation of the man's brain had taken place. This comparison will afford a striking example in proof of the argument which physiologists to-day put forward with reference to the *tréponème* which caused what in these pages has been called Maupassant's "Great Distress." Physiologists maintain that, terrible and fatal as are the ultimate consequences of an invasion of the human body by the pale and spiral microbe, one of the early results of the hideous transformation it is producing in its victim's system is an enormous development of the mental powers. It is said to lend genius to the unfortunate wretch whom it proposes to destroy, if genius be latent within him. The poisons that it generates intoxicate its prey into a delirium, in the excitement of which, as in a haschish dream, the brain develops a superhuman activity. These physiologists go so far as to attribute many works of human genius to the fact that their creators acted under the whip of

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

the parasites that eventually destroyed them. And this influence is said to be continued in succeeding generations, who do not only inherit disease, but powers of ultra-achievement also.

The Robert La Tôque referred to in the above letter was Robert Pinchon, who died recently, librarian at the Rouen Library. He was one of the five partners in *La Feuille à l'Envers* yawl.

"We five," he writes in *Mouche*, "we owned a single boat, bought with the greatest difficulty, a boat on which we laughed as we shall-never laugh again. It was a large yawl, rather heavy, but solid, roomy and comfortable. I won't paint you the portraits of my comrades. There was one, a little fellow, very sharp, nicknamed Petit Bleu; a big 'un with a wild look, who had grey eyes and black hair, styled Tomahawk; another witty and lazy, surnamed La Tôque, the only one who never touched an oar, on the pretext that he would upset the boat; a thin fellow, elegant, very well groomed, whom we called 'N'a-qu'un-Oeil,' in remembrance of one of Cladel's recent novels and because he wore a monocle; and finally myself, who had been baptized Joseph Prunier."

Robert Pinchon collaborated with Maupassant in a play called *La Maison Turque à la Feuille de Rose*, which was remembered against them by Goncourt and others. Petit-Bleu was the nickname of Léon Fontaine, a journalist of parts, who helped Maupassant to get his first short story published, by recommending it to the editor of a provincial almanach: *L'Almanac Lorrain de Pont-à-Mousson*, in which in 1875 a story signed "Joseph Prunier" appeared.

## CHAPTER XIV

Maupassant's First Short Story—"Joseph Prunier"—Shakespeare's Hand—Irreverence, Pessimism or What?—Moiron and Marie Bashkirtseff—Flaubert's Doubts—Maupassant's Devilling—Guy, no Reader—The "Illiterate" Maupassant—Guy's Journalistic Efforts—As Daudet Remembered Him—"Learning The Trade."

**T**HE story that appeared in the Pont-à-Mousson almanach, signed "Joseph Prunier," from the publication of which Maupassant got nothing beyond the pleasure of seeing himself in print in an obscure annual in the province of his origin, was entitled *La Main de l'Ecorché*. It may be read to-day as it was printed in 1875 in the volume entitled *Misti*, which was issued after Maupassant's death. This book contains also *Le Million*, which is the rough draft from which later that fine story *L'Heritage* was elaborated, just as *La Main de l'Ecorché* was afterwards transformed into *La Main*. The opportunity thus afforded to the lover of Maupassant to compare the rough draft with the final version, and to acquire some insight into the process by which literary excellence is reached by the masters, may atone in his eyes for the publication of a book that in itself does little credit to the author's memory, a publication prompted by mere motives of lucre without heed for the writer's reputation. *La Main de l'Ecorché* (The Hand of the Man Who Was Skinned Alive) is not well written, is told in the first person

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

and would certainly be described in the stock phrases of English criticism as, on the one hand, not "well put together," and, on the other hand, as "rather far-fetched." It tells of a student who has brought back to Paris from Normandy the hand of a criminal who had been skinned alive in former days. The student hangs it outside his door as a bell-handle. The landlord objects, and the hand is brought in and hung up in the recess where his bed stands. The next day the student is found, unconscious and half-strangled, in his room with the marks of five fingers on his throat. There is evidence of a fearful struggle. The hand has disappeared. The student goes mad. Maupassant goes to see him in the asylum and finds him dying. He dies shouting: "Take her (*la main*), take her. He is strangling me. Help! help!" "He rushed round the room twice, yelling, then he fell down dead, with his face to the floor." Maupassant was appointed to take his body down to Normandy, "as he was an orphan." The grave-diggers, digging a grave for the orphan, come upon a coffin. A blow with the pick knocks off its lid, and inside is seen a huge skeleton, "lying on its back, who with its hollow eye seemed to be looking at us and defying us. I felt quite poorly. I don't know why, but I felt almost afraid." The skeleton was that of a man who had his hand cut off. The hand is lying in the coffin beside him. "I say," said one of the grave-diggers, "one would fancy he was looking at you and that he's going to jump at your throat to make you give him back his hand."

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

And this is how Joseph Prunier-ended this story :

"Next day all was finished and I took my way back to Paris after having left the old curé fifty francs to say masses for the soul of him whose sepulchre we had thus disturbed."

And Joseph Prunier was Guy de Maupassant at the age of 25.\*

Whether it was in remembrance of the first story of his that was printed, or whether a natural taste for what was sinister prompted him, Maupassant acquired and was fond of showing amongst his gewgaws and curiosities a ghastly, dessicated human hand, as to the origin of which the wildest fancies might be indulged in. Might it not be the hand of Damiens, the right hand that had struck Louis XV, and, holding the pen-knife with which the insult was delivered, was severed from the arm by the pressure of a red-hot iron, while Maupeou looked on approvingly? Or of any of the hundreds and thousands who had been so mutilated in the "good old days"? Anyhow there was the hand, a hideous object. A passage in François's memoirs refers to this *bibelot* and gives an instance of his master's raillery which is not pleasant :

"Monsieur," writes the valet, "then went to his bathroom. Hardly had he got into the bath, than Pirol<sup>†</sup>" (Maupassant's cat, called so after Count Pirolì, an Italian friend) "jumped on the little piece of furniture which was fixed at the head of the bath and tried to reach the newspaper which Monsieur de Maupassant was reading. As she couldn't manage this, she kept dealing blows at his hair with her velvety paws, and,

\* It is not surprising that it was not till five years later that Flaubert began to see that there might be some future for Maupassant as a writer of prose and as a story-teller.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

gesticulating thus, caused a dessicated human hand which lay on this shelf, to fall into the water. My master said to her, scoldingly: "What! Do you make Shakespeare's hand fall into my bath? Oh! the little hussy." Then giving me the hand, he said: "Wipe it carefully and put it further back, where she won't be able to topple it over."

"Shakespeare's hand"! If he called it that from bravado, remembering the warning on the slab at Stratford-on-Avon, the superstitious and those who believe in the *hors là* (the supernatural) might trace a connection between this violation of the bones (though in imagination alone) and the fearful fate that befel him only seven years later, the worst fate that any curse could bring on any man. If it were mere raillery, it was an unfortunate instance of his tendency to ridicule, vilify and blacken what most men hold in high respect.

This tendency, born of his pessimism and embitterment, led him in several of his stories to use for his characters, names associated in men's mind with lives totally different from those described. For instance, the story, *Moiron* (in the *Clair de Lune* collection), in which he describes the crimes, arrest, trial, condemnation, reprieve, transportation, return and deathbed confession of an insane schoolmaster who for sheer love of murder poisons several of his pupils. It is one of the stories to which, no doubt, Baudelaire's translation of Edgar Allan Poe had prompted him. What is not so easily explainable is why he chose for such a character a name respected by all Frenchmen. Moiron was the heroic officer who at the bridge of Arcola



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

threw himself in front of General Bonaparte to shield him from the Austrian volleys, and saved his life at the cost of his own. Napoleon never forgot this service. When Hudson Lowe and his other gaolers refused him his title of emperor, he asked to be allowed to take the name of Moiron—for he would not allow himself to be addressed as General Bonaparte—saying he would be quite content to be known as Colonel Moiron, the bravest man he had known. Also, a few days before his death, he entered the following clause into the second codicil to his will :

40-*Idem*, We bequeath one hundred thousand francs (100,000) to the widow, son or grandson of our aide-de-camp Moiron, killed at our side at Arcole while covering us with his body.

Why, with millions of names to choose from, was one selected which was that of a humble hero, beloved by Napoleon, to christen a vile criminal? It was not oversight, or in the haste of composition or delivery to the hungry press, because the name of Napoleon would be in his mind all the time that he was writing the story, for one of the main incidents is where Moiron's petition for reprieve comes before Napoleon III, who grants it on the plea of the Empress Eugénie. In his story, *En Voyage*, Maupassant describes a Russian grande dame, who dies of consumption at Cannes :

" She was a Russian, the Countess Marie Baranow, a very great lady, of exquisite beauty. You know how beautiful the Russian women are, or rather how beautiful they seem to us

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

with their finely chiselled noses, their delicate mouths, their eyes not too far apart, eyes of a colour one cannot define, a greyish blue, their cold, rather hard, grace. They have something evil and seducing, something haughty and gentle, something tender and severe, which is altogether charming to a Frenchman."

Everybody who read this story when it appeared in *Gil Blas* (it appeared in book form in 1884 in the *Miss Harriet* volume) would recognize, under "Marie Baranow," from the name no less than from the description, the wonderful Countess Marie Bashkirtseff, who also died of consumption, though not at Cannes, on October 31st, 1884, and would recall how Marie had loved Guy de Maupassant for a while and the letters they had exchanged.\*

The quality of the Joseph Prunier letter explains to some extent why it was not till some five years later that Flaubert began to see that there might be some future for Guy as a writer of prose and story-teller. At the same time already early in their association

\* A sad fact in connection with this story is that it may have been one of the last things that Marie read. On the morning of October 26th, after a terrible night, she felt a little better and asked her cousin Dina Babanine to go out and buy her the latest books. Dina returned with *Les Ridicules du Temps*, by Barbey d'Aurevilly, and *Miss Harriet*, by Guy de Maupassant. In the latter she would read of the "Russian Countess of exquisite beauty" who died of consumption. She could not fail to recognise herself under the name "Marie Baranow." She had then five more days to live. She knew that she too was dying of consumption. But possibly she turned rather to *La Mère Sauvage* which is the last story in *Miss Harriet*, the story on which she had rallied the author in her first letter to him, calling it *une vieille rengaine* (a hackneyed old theme). However the book soon dropped from her nerveless hands and in the afternoon she was begging Dina to read her a chapter from Michelet, no doubt from his story of Joan of Arc. This to recall the beautiful, grey eyes of the man whom she loved at the end, the grey eyes of Jules Bastien-Lepage, the eyes, of which she wrote that they "had seen Joan of Arc."

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

Maupassant was admitted to the honour of helping his master in the preparation of his books. Towards the end of his life Flaubert was engaged on the book *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, the publication of which, after his sudden and premature death, Maupassant was piously to superintend, and for various parts of this he called on his pupil for notes and descriptions. *En passant* it may be noted that he never gave him errands to run on Saturdays, Saturday being for Maupassant, as Flaubert puts it in one of his letters, "the sacrosanct day of boating." In his Correspondence there are given, for November, 1877, two letters to Maupassant asking him for a description of the coast between Cape Antifer and Etretat and thanking him for what he had sent in. "I understand all the coast now as though I had it before my eyes. But it is too complicated and I want something simpler, because otherwise there would be no end to all the explanations that would have to be given. Consider that the whole of this passage in my book is not to fill more than three pages, of which two will be taken by the dialogue and the psychological analysis." He then goes into a long account of the scene he wishes to place in the setting of a cliff, with a path going round a corner out of sight, with behind it a *valleuse*, which is Norman for a small barren valley or canyon, as grim and forbidding-looking as possible, and another *valleuse*, or some other means of getting up to the top of the cliff as easily as possible. Bouvard and Pécuchet were to have a discussion on the end of the world, and a

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

Cuvierian cataclysm and the *mise-en-scène* had to be as asked for. Flaubert would not invent it. Maupassant had to find a corresponding spot on the coast. In another letter, the one beginning "*Mon chéri*," he asks Maupassant, who is now at the Ministry of Public Education and Fine Arts, to look up some references for him for his last chapter, which was to be called "*L'Education*."

"If I could rummage through the library in your Ministry, I should find treasures there, I am sure of it. But how to begin one's search? I should want characteristic things, like curricula of studies and *methods* of tuition.

"I want to show that education, no matter what form it may take, amounts to very little and that it is Nature which does all or almost all. Have you a catalogue of your library? Run through it and see what might be of use to me. If I were to read you my draft, you would see what would suit me. It will be drawn up in a fortnight from now."

In other letters he sets Maupassant upon a botanist named Baudry, whom he has written to about some botanical matter that he wishes to deal with in his novel. Baudry hasn't answered. After Maupassant's visit, Baudry does write, "but does not answer a *single* one of my questions. On the other hand he gives me advice on the art of writing." He goes on to explain to Maupassant what is the information he wants, and says: "I shall get it by myself, even if I have to spend ten years over it. But do you try through your acquaintances amongst the professors to rout out a botanist for me; that will save me a lot of time. Your Old Man, who embraces you in a state of exasperation impossible to describe."

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

In this letter he repeats his precept, that to write one must read, and speaks of perusing 1500 books in order to produce a single volume. Nor was it idle talk when he wrote that he would spend ten years if necessary to get his point right. It is a pathetic circumstance that when he penned those words he had just four more weeks to live!

Maupassant did not follow his advice about reading extensively, but contented himself very effectively with studying nature and mankind. He read little or nothing.\* He has even been described as "illiterate." These observations he gave out without any attempt to produce an artistic effect or to display scientific knowledge, in the simplest, most natural and purest French. His prose steps directly from his writing-table into the realms of French classics. Yet none of his phrases have been remembered for the music of them, or retained. Poets late-walking in the streets of Paris have been, and possibly to this day may still be, heard rolling out Flaubert's sonorous prose for sheer delight in the rhythm and swing of it. Maupassant did not produce this effect, did not want to produce it, and may outlive his master as La Fontaine outlives Despréaux.

Maupassant had not the time for so much reading. When he was out of the office, he was on the river or taking tremendous walks. He often walked up to town, when he had to be there early in the mornings,

\*On account of his bad sight. His large library was for his friends. His own favourite book was "Manon Lescaut."

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

tramping long miles after midnight. On one such occasion he had the adventure he describes in the story *Le Colporteur*. He was as often in the river as on it, for he bathed all the year round. In *Fort Comme La Mort* he refers to his swimming exploits at the age of twenty, when, as "a clerk at the Home Office," he used to dive off suburban bridges into the Seine, to amaze the bourgeois. This citation has the special interest that this is one of the very rare passages where in speaking of a Government clerk he makes him an employé of another Ministry than the Marine. All his types nearly are taken from among the clerks at the Admiralty. He never caricatures or even depicts characters at the Public Education and Fine Arts office, where he spent some time after leaving the *Ministère de la Marine*. This was possibly because he was getting a somewhat better salary at the *Instruction Publique*, also because he had much more time there for his literary work and consequently chafed less against his servitude. Also, thanks to Flaubert's unremitting efforts on his behalf, he had by this time got a small connection with the Parisian press and was earning small sums. Monsieur de Monzie speaks of regular contributions to *La Nation* (possibly at a sou a line). As "Guy de Valmont" he contributes to various magazines and newspapers. *Le Gaulois* honoured itself by accepting some of his earliest writings. He was at all times engaged in writing poetry, some of which, as for instance, his *Au Bord de l'Eau* and *La Dernière Escapade*, was

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

printed in *La République des Lettres*, a review edited by Catulle Mendès,\* or dramatic work.

That while he considered Gustave Flaubert as his master and guide, he never abdicated any of his independence into his hands, is shown once more by the fact that when, in August, 1876, in consequence of an article on Renan published in the *République des Lettres*, Flaubert quarrelled with Catulle Mendès, the editor, and ordered him to erase his name from his list of contributors and to cease sending him his paper, and wrote to Maupassant advising him to follow his example and break with Mendès and *La République des Lettres*, Maupassant simply wrote to him explaining, though not justifying the article, and continued his connection with the paper and with its editor.

At the same time, when two months later Maupassant contributed to this same newspaper an article on Gustave Flaubert, the master wrote him under date October 25th, 1876:

"Thank you for your article, my dear friend! You have treated me with filial tenderness. My niece is enthusiastic about this piece of work. She finds that it is the best thing that has been written about her uncle so far. I think so too but I don't venture to say so. Only that about the Talmud is too much, I am not as strong as all that." •

He makes no objection to the fact that Maupassant continues to write for this paper and even asks him whether he ought not to write and thank the editor for having inserted the article.

\* It was in this review that Zola's *L'Assommoir* appeared as a serial, after the *Bien Public*, in deference to popular outcry had stopped its publication of this masterpiece.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

Also, although he warns his pupil against having any dealings with the newspapers, he continues unremitting in his efforts to get him work on the press, while Maupassant himself left not a stone unturned to place his "copy." Alphonse Daudet, speaking about Maupassant in 1893, shortly before his death, refers to this :

"What a fine thing is diagnosis.

"During a year or perhaps two years I used to meet Guy de Maupassant every Sunday at Flaubert's morning receptions. Flaubert adored him and whenever Maupassant said anything, he used to turn round with an affectionate laugh and the eyes of a doting papa. And at this same time Maupassant who was still unknown, used to be constantly coming up the splendid staircase of my old abode on the third floor of the Hôtel Lamoignon, where, I believe, one of his relations, a retired colonel, also lived. Every time that he came he used to bring me a story, an 'impression' of a hundred or a hundred and fifty lines, which he used to ask me 'to get put in somewhere' for him. I don't think he used to tell Flaubert about this. Two or three of these short stories must have appeared in the *Bulletin Français*, under some pseudonym or other, which I don't remember. What were their titles, what were they about? All that is too long ago for me to remember. But what is absolutely certain is that in these first writings of the master-author, there was not, any more than in his conversation, or his features, or his gestures, or his manners, anything, a single thing to let us know that this was Maupassant who was before us, the Maupassant who was afterwards revealed to us, a splendid personality, a powerful human machine under full steam-pressure, there in our midst. It was his eyes alone that sometimes scared me—lookless eyes, 'closed, gliding, impenetrable eyes of streaky agate which absorbed the light but did not send it back again. Apart from that his face was as commonplace as it could be. And if this Norman youngster, stockily built, with a complexion ruddy from drinking strong cider, had consulted me, on what profession it would be best for him to follow, as so many people did, I should have



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

answered him without a moment's hesitation: 'Don't, ever, ever, think of writing.'

"Aye, it's a fine thing, is diagnosis."

Those who read Maupassant's early efforts reproduced in *Le Père Milon* and *Misti*, remembering that these are only the very best specimens of his apprentice work and that quantities of "copy" placed for him in all kinds of periodicals and newspapers have fortunately escaped republication, will agree with Daudet (as indeed with Flaubert) that prose-writing did not seem Maupassant's vocation between the ages of twenty and thirty, the ten years of his self-imposed preparation. For that he considered himself, although a frequent contributor—though not under his own name—to the press (at starvation wages, be it remarked), as a mere tyro, apprentice, catechumen, probationer, is shown by the fact that more than once, pressed to produce "a work" (the book *à longue haleine*, of which Flaubert wrote to his mother), he invariably answered: "Not yet. I am learning my trade."



FLAUBERT'S STUDY AT CROISSET, WHERE MAUPASSANT USED TO MEET ALL THE LITERARY CELEBRITIES OF HIS DAY, AND WHERE FLAUBERT DIED AND GUY RENDERED HIM THE LAST SERVICES.  
*(By courtesy of M. Henri Detontaine.)*



ZOLA'S COUNTRY HOUSE AT MÉDAN, WHERE "LES SOIRÉES DE MÉDAN," IN WHICH "BOULE DE SUIF" FIRST APPEARED, WAS PROJECTED.



## CHAPTER XV

Maupassant and Tourgueneff—Which Read Which?—The Early Friendships—Maupassant and Mallarmé—Their Styles Contrasted—Maupassant and Renan—And H. Taine—Princess Mathilde's Hauteur—Zola's Unvarying Enthusiasm—Maupassant and the Stage—A Notable Première—What Might Have Been.

**I**T was at these Sunday matinées at Flaubert's flat in the rue Murillo, as also very occasionally down at Flaubert's bungalow at Croisset, that Maupassant made the acquaintance of men whose names were already famous in French literature and were to become even more so. Here it was that he met Alphonse Daudet, Tourgueneff, J. M. de Heredia, Huysmans, Goncourt, Emile Zola, Catulle Mendés, Hennique, Céard (who was doing for Zola much what Maupassant did for Flaubert, getting him his documents); also Charpentier, the publisher, Bergerat and Paul Alexis (who in his book on Zola, *Notes d'un Ami*, describes these gatherings). With most of these men Maupassant made friends. He seems to have taken a great liking for Tourgueneff, and in the first draft of his story, *La Peur*, sympathetically describes one afternoon when the great Russian was speaking and told a ghastly tale of fear. Maynial writes that "Tourgueneff took an interest in Maupassant's debuts and read his first manuscripts." As a matter of fact it appears that the Russian writer did *not* read Maupassant's tyro efforts. It is related that Maupassant,

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

having sent him a collection of his early writings for a "candid opinion," received them back without a word of comment. Also when later on he wanted—it was before the great success of *Boule-de-Suif* and Maupassant's definite "arrival"—to include Tourgueneff in a series of articles he was then projecting on contemporary writers—similar to the one he had written about Flaubert—the Russian begged him not to do so, saying that he detested publicity and so on. Maupassant at the time was not very well equipped for writing on Tourgueneff, for if the Russian did not read his efforts, Maupassant seems not to have read many of Tourguéneff's writings. For very shortly before he lost his reason—that is to say, in 1891—he was projecting to contribute an article on Tourguéneff to the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, and wrote to his mother to beg her to read up all the Russian's novels and let him have a short synopsis of each of the books—"say twenty-five or thirty lines on each"—for the purposes of this article. This would have been his third article on the author of "Fathers and Sons," for in 1880 he published a short article in the *Gaulois* on "The Inventor of the word Nihilist," and, shortly after Tourguéneff's death in 1883, in the same paper an account of the man and his work.

As a contributor to *La République des Lettres*, he used to dine often with Catulle Mendés at dinners in the rue de Bruxelles, at which the editor used to reunite his contributors. Flaubert, until he quarrelled with Mendés, used sometimes to take the chair at these

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

banquets. Henri Roujon, who met him here, speaks of Guy at the time as "smiling and courteous, like a man who found himself in his natural surroundings." Maynial suggests that, smiling though he was, he must have found the interminable discussions on art and aesthetics supremely boring. He would have preferred the kind of conversation that so amused Flaubert and that Zola refers to in his account of Maupassant in those days. Two big men besides Flaubert used to come to these dinners, and these were Villiers de l'Isle-Adam and Stéphane Mallarmé, the professor of English literature and head of the "symbolist" school of French poets. Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's opinion of his fellow-guest is not on record. Maupassant had high respect for the author of *L'Amour Suprême* and *Les Contes Cruels*, which may possibly have influenced him to some small extent in the writing of some of his short stories. Being ten years his junior in years, he no doubt considered and addressed him as "master." As to the chief of the symbolist school of French poetry, it is difficult to understand that any sympathy could exist between him, who deliberately wrote obscurely, and Maupassant, whose limpidity and clarity of style were equally the outcome of tremendous preparation and constant labour. Mallarmé took all the pains in the world to be almost incomprehensible. Maupassant concentrated all his efforts on producing his effects with the simplest phrases and words hall-marked from the French classics. Mallarmé was Maupassant's senior by eight

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

years and would be considered by the young Government clerk as a "master" also, but one cannot help wondering what his true opinion was of the prose that Mallarmé was contributing to *La République des Lettres*. Here as a specimen of this prose is an appreciation, in the original French, of Maupassant, that Mallarmé wrote in 1893, a few weeks before Maupassant's death :

"Je l'admire, à cause de dons ! Je ne peux oublier, en les loisirs instinctivement que mon choix se portait sur une œuvre de Maupassant pour aérer le regard et lire limpide pour lire. Le charme, au lettré, qu'ici l'afflux de la Vie ne relègue le style ; un mélange savoureux plutôt et, par l'intermédiaire des mots, avec leur valeur, elle paraît. L'écrivain, conteur quotidien, est de race."

These sentences formulating Mallarmé's opinion of an author may be compared with some edification with the said author's formulation of his literary creed :

"J'arrive," wrote Maupassant, defining his literary method, "à cette conclusion que pour bien écrire, en artiste, en coloriste, en sensitif et en imagier, il faut décrire et non pas analyser. Au fond, notre art consiste à montrer l'intimité des âmes de façon à la rendre visible, émouvante et surtout esthétique. Pour moi la psychologie dans la nouvelle ou le roman se résume à ceci : mettre en scène l'homme secret par sa vie."

Most of the people whom Maupassant used to meet on Sundays at Flaubert's house could be seen again on Thursdays at Zola's receptions. Here he also used to meet Edouard Rod, Cézanne, François Coppée and very occasionally Ernest Renan. The last-named can have had au fond no sympathy whatever with either

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

his host, Zola, or with any of the other naturalists who formed what was called "Zola's tail," amongst whom was Guy de Maupassant. Here is a pronouncement he once made to an English writer in Paris, dealing with Zola and his school :

"On one occasion he almost rebuked me. I had been speaking of the Naturalists, and he cried out : 'Nay, Monsieur, you must not speak to me about the Naturalists. I think nothing about them. That is low, far away, out of sight, beneath. It is the mud. It is a pity for French literature. I have a horror for what is coarse. At Pompeii all that was coarse was secreted and hidden away. It is a pity that we do not do the same in these days. I confess that I cannot understand how the French, so lettered, so scholarly, and so full of taste, can tolerate such horrors as are the modern novels.' Nor would he ever allow me to talk to him of Guy de Maupassant."

It was possibly because Maupassant, who could read a man's inmost thoughts like an open book, had detected the animosity against him and his friends that lurked in the heart of the sleek, bland, unctuous Breton, that he had not quarrelled with Mendés about the article on Renan when Flaubert asked him to do so, and had indeed tried to pacify the master towards the editor of *La République des Lettres*.

Another great man whom Maupassant in these days used to meet at Flaubert's receptions (and, according to Maynial, at Zola's also) was Hippolyte Taine, the philosopher and historian. Maupassant speaks of Taine's visits to Flaubert.

"Other people," he writes, "came in, little by little : M. Taine with his eyes hidden behind his spectacles, timid in



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

manner, who brought us historical documents, unknown facts, a pervading odour and taste of old archives rummaged through, a striking vision of the life of bye-gone days seen with the eagle eyes of a philosopher. . . .

Taine greatly admired Maupassant's vigorous talent. He used to speak of him as "a bull who is sad" (*un taureau triste*). Maupassant wrote of him in one of his last letters to his mother as "Taine," as though he were on terms of comradeship with the philosopher, who had compared him to Aeschylus. They had become friendly in 1888, years after their first meeting, and their friendship has been described as "very close." One has difficulty, however, in imagining Taine as fostering a warm friendship for anybody, and indeed Madame Taine, after her husband's death, wrote of their relationship as follows:

"My husband was never much in Guy de Maupassant's company, who was so much younger than he was; he had, however, frequently met him at Flaubert's house on those Sunday afternoons when Tourguéneff, Zola, Bouilhet (?) and others besides, used to foregather there. After Flaubert's death Monsieur de Maupassant only came twice to our house, once on a call in Paris with Heredia, and once to luncheon at our country-house on Lake Annecy, when he was accompanied by Doctor Cazalis, very shortly before his illness caused him to be shut up for the rest of his days. I need not say that M. Taine had the very greatest admiration for his young confrère's talent, but he lived a very secluded life in his work-room, which explains how rarely they met."

Maupassant's censor-bearers, thinking to enhance his glory by writing of his friendships with great men, render disservice to his memory when these friendships are qualified by the other side, as in the letter

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

from Madame Taine. The censor-bearers forget that Maupassant was a much bigger man than most of the friends and comrades whom adulation forces upon him. Lumbroso published an arid letter from that Princess Mathilde who played the part of a frugal female Maecenas in the Paris of Maupassant's day, a letter which disposes of the stories of the brilliant part which he had played in that salon in which Goncourt was so proud to hold a minor rôle. The Princess wrote to the baron to the effect that she certainly had occasionally received Monsieur de Maupassant, but had no recollections of him to communicate; altogether a very haughty letter to have been written about M. de Maupassant by the daughter of Jerome Bonaparte, bigamist by imperial favour, who to her dying day should have boasted of the honour that Guy had done her in visiting her dreary and pompous entertainments.

Amongst Taine's papers, after his death, was found a note hastily pencilled on paper of the steamship company that plied on the lake. From its contents it seems to have been written in 1890 (the year in which the Flaubert memorial was inaugurated at Rouen), and Madame Taine thought it must have been received in June of that year—that is to say, not very long before Maupassant's final breakdown, and at a time when he was wretchedly ill. This note was as follows :

“ My dear Master :

“ I passed in front of your house and from the boat contemplated the big pointed roof of it and I beg the captain to see

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

that this note gets into your hands to bring you the remembrance of your very faithful admirer.

"We are inaugurating at Rouen, on July 10th, the monument to Flaubert. If you did not live so very far away I would beg you to be present at this very simple ceremony to which only the true friends will be invited.

"Believe, my dear Master, in my profoundly devoted sentiments,

GUY DE MAUPASSANT.

As a matter of fact the Flaubert memorial was inaugurated on November 23rd, 1890. The actual date of this letter it would be most interesting to know. Was Maupassant on Lake Annecy in June, 1890? He certainly was in 1891, and there seems to have been some suggestion that this note was written in that year—that is to say, several months after the memorial at Rouen had been unveiled. This would give striking proof of the amnesia which seized upon him towards the end, the amnesia which is one of the symptoms and concomitants of the hideous evil that beset him.

If after Maupassant's collapse several of his so-called friends made haste to qualify their acquaintance with him, Zola at least, the Titan Zola, albeit he must have known that Maupassant had more than once spoken of him with aspersion and contempt, from the very first trumpeted his admiration for him abroad, an attitude towards him from which he never departed. Here, for instance, is what he wrote of him in 1893, before his death:

"Maupassant belongs to the family of the simple, the clear and the strong whom I love. His success, so great and so

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

swift, came because he brought what is best in our French genius, a clearness of observation and a sanity of style. There may be artists of greater penetration than he; I do not know any story-tellers who are more solid and more complete. He will leave behind him in his stories masterpieces refulgent with all the qualities of our race.—EMILE ZOLA.

Zola wrote about all the five writers who contributed to *Les Soirées de Médan*, and this is what he wrote about Maupassant :

"I made Maupassant's acquaintance at Flaubert's house. It was towards 1874. He had barely left school at that time and nobody in our literary corner had yet noticed him. When we used to arrive on Sundays, towards two o'clock, at the little apartment in the rue Murillo, that apartment of narrow rooms whose windows opened on the shades of Parc Monceau, we almost always used to find Maupassant already installed there, having at times taken luncheon with the master, to whom he used to come thus each week to read him his literary attempts and who used to make him severely work over again any sentence the sonority of which was dubious. As soon as we had come in, Maupassant used modestly to efface himself. He used to speak little, but used to listen with the air of a sturdy fellow who knows his thews are strong and who is taking notes.

"Later on, there was established comradeship between us. He used to amaze us with accounts of his prowesses. A man of middle height, strong-backed with iron muscles and a ruddy complexion he was a terrible oarsman in those days and used for his pleasure to row fifty miles in one day on the Seine. Besides this he was a fine male and used to bring the most amazing stories about women, braggings about love which broadened the good Flaubert in enormous fits of laughing.

"Up till then, we hadn't even asked ourselves whether Maupassant had any talent or not. We did know certain bits he had written, bits of poetry, written for men; but it is easy enough to show vigour in that sort of thing. And accordingly we were filled with surprise when he published a short poem; 'Au Bord de l'Eau,' which had qualities of the first order, a solidity and a simplicity of very rare make, the nature

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

of a writer already master of his trade. Thenceforward he counted as somebody with us, he was classed among the young whose growth we were watching, as one of the best endowed, one of those who have the most courage, the most strength to carry on the century's task from where his seniors have left it.

"Another surprise, another revelation was *Boule de Suif*, the short story which Maupassant published in *Les Soirées de Médan*. The last time I conversed with Flaubert, at Croisset, he said to me : 'Maupassant has just written a short story which is very well done. You will be pleased with it.' When I got the printed volume of the 'Soirées' and had read the story, I was delighted with it; it is certainly the best of the six, it has a balance, a carriage, a delicacy and a clearness of analysis which make it a small masterpiece. Indeed it was all sufficient to place Maupassant in the eyes of the literary public in the first rank amongst the young and coming writers.

"This then is his temperament : a strong square build which is altogether Norman, a full-blooded solidity, the style of a writer who is thoroughbred. He certainly owes much to Flaubert whose adopted son he has been during the last years. But he brings with him a personal originality which broke through in his first poems and which now asserts itself in his prose; his best pages flare with a virility, a sense of physical passion. And there is no nervous perversion, there is only strong, healthy desire, the free loves of the earth and of life broadly spread out under the sun. That gives to all he writes a very personal accent of fruitful good health and of a fine humour which is slightly inclined to braggadocio."

In these early years at the Admiralty, although Maupassant had now come to the decision that it was with his pen that he would carve himself a way out of "the hell of a Government office," he had not fully made up his mind what branch of literature he would devote himself to. He knew he was skilful as a poet, but he knew there was no money to be looked for from poetry. His hopes at one time were in writing

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

for the stage. It was said in his first years in Paris that he only thing that could take him away from his boating was writing for the stage. Unfortunately his first big effort in this direction was a play which shows the influence that the atmosphere of eroticism in which he had been brought up had had on his mind. It is this play that the relentless Goncourt refers to as "Maupassant's pornographic play" in his entry after the inauguration of the memorial at Rouen. It was called "*La Maison Turque à la Feuille de Rose*," and put on the stage a Parisian house of the *Maison Tellier* variety. It was written in collaboration with Robert Pinchon, the La Toque of the boat, in 1873. In this "*comédie libre*," Maupassant played a woman's part. Pinchon played an amorous hunchback, apparently with great success. It was performed for the first time at Leloir's studio in 1875, and again in 1877 in the studio of G. Becker. There is an account of this performance on May 16th. One of the audience, the actress named Suzanne Lagier, showed great disgust and walked out. Tourguéneff applauded vigorously. Zola looked very grave, but Flaubert was enthusiastic over the "refreshment which this violent love-adventure" gave him. Baron Lumbroso says that this *comédie libre* makes him think of certain pieces of erotic poetry by Maupassant which were published in Brussels in 1881 but which had been written at about the same time as *La Feuille de Rose*, of which two were called *Une Source*, and *La Femme à Barbe*, which appeared in *Le Nouveau Parnasse Satyrique*

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

*du XIX Siècle*. Like much that he wrote, these pieces had not been censored by Flaubert, who would not have allowed them to pass, not because they might be considered pornographic, a word Flaubert did not admit and a word that can never be applied by the most Puritan of critics to anything that Maupassant wrote, but because the writing did not reach in either piece the very high standard that Flaubert had set his pupil to attain.

It was then also that Maupassant wrote his *Histoire du Vieux Temps*, which was played for the first time on February 19th, 1879, at the Théâtre Ballande, and has frequently been played since. Eight days after its first performance, Flaubert wrote to Maupassant from Croisset: "Where are you publishing *l'Histoire du Vieux Temps*? As soon as I get back to Paris we must get it played by Madame Pasca at Princess Mathilde's. I'll see that that is done." At the time this letter was written Maupassant had another play ready, a play in verse called "*La Répétition*." As to this piece, Flaubert writes: "Let's first of all speak about *La Répétition*. Well, it's very, very nice. The part of René would make an actor's reputation and it's full of good lines, such as the last line on page 53. I won't point out the others for I'm in a great hurry. The lover's right-about and the arrival of the husband are dramatic. It's amusing, subtle, gentlemanly, charming. Be sure to send a copy of this volume to Princess Mathilde, with your card stuck in at the title-page. I should much like to see it played in her salon."

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

It seems certain that but for his evil fate, that struck him down in full mental activity, Maupassant would have developed into a dramatic author of high rank. It had been all along his ambition and was so still at the end of his career, when sated with glory he was looking to his pen for the large income which his mode of life and the charges of his relations made necessary. Also having had, like all who wish to write to the stage, innumerable rebuffs and disappointments he had a score to settle with the managers who had had no confidence in his talents. This piece, *La Répétition*, was written in 1876, and had been refused at the Vaudeville Theatre, a refusal which had greatly disappointed him. This is what he wrote at the time to his friend, Pinchon :

“As for me, I’m not troubling about theatrical work at present. It’s a sure thing, the managers are not worth working for. It’s true, they find one’s pieces charming, but they don’t play them and, as far as I am concerned, I would rather they found them rotten and would put them on the stage. All of which to report that Raymond Deslandes finds my *Répétition* too subtle for the Vaudeville.”

*La Répétition* was not played until eleven years after Maupassant’s death, and for the first time on May 6th, 1904, at the Théâtre Normand. *L’Histoire du Vieux Temps*—it is an act in verse, with only two characters—is now on the répertoire of the Comédie Française. It was published in 1879 in the form of a sixteen-page plaquette, of which only one hundred copies were issued. These are so rare to-day that



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

each copy is worth its weight in 1000-franc notes. The publisher was Tresse.

In 1891 there was produced at the Gymnase theatre a play called *Musotte*, a comedy in three acts, written in collaboration with Jacques Normand, and on March 6th, 1893, four months before Maupassant's death, his two-act comedy, *La Paix du Ménage*, was successfully produced at the Comédie Française. *Musotte* was taken from his short story, *L'Enfant*, in the *Clair de Lune* collection, one of the stories in which Maupassant shows that, pessimistic in the extreme as was his attitude towards women, he believed there were exceptions and painted a beautiful female character. On his wedding night a young man is summoned to the bedside of his mistress, dying in childbirth. After her death he returns home to his bride carrying his motherless child, the newborn baby. "Your child," says his bride, "Well, we'll bring it up, the little fellow." The subject being sentimental, did not greatly appeal to Koning, the manager of the Gymnase, and Maupassant considered that the manager did not do the best to make it a success and wrote him an angry letter, in which the pathologists professed to detect signs of his megalomania. "You have a success with one of the slightest of my stories," he wrote to Koning. "Now I have written at least a hundred and twenty *nouvelles* which are as good as this one (*L'Enfant*), so there are a hundred and twenty successes which are slipping through your fingers; that's to say, a fortune, years of fortunes that are being lost.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

So much the worse for you." He was of opinion that any of his short stories would dramatize excellently, in which he may not have been mistaken, and wrote to Jacques Normand, his collaborator on *Musotte*: "Plays? I'll write as many as I like. Consider that apart from my novels, *Une Vie*, *Fort Comme La Mort*, *Notre Cœur* and the others, which have all, all, a stage-play in embryo in them, I have published over two hundred short stories, every one of which, or at any rate the greatest number of which, contain a dramatic subject, either in a tragical note, or in a note of comedy."

The fact that his play, *La Paix du Ménage*, was accepted by the Comédie Française and was successfully produced there proves that Maupassant's belief in the successful dramatisation of his short stories was fully warranted, and that what people afterwards took for incipient *folie des grandeurs* was but a perfectly warrantable conviction. *La Paix du Ménage* is another adaptation of one of his stories, namely, *Au Bord du Lit* in the *Monsieur Parent* collection. It is one of Maupassant's stories which have most delighted his women readers. A beautiful countess, neglected by her husband, having succeeded in luring him to desire to resume cohabitation with her, refuses him access to her chamber until he has paid her the sum of five thousand francs as the payment in advance for a month's enjoyment of her favours. "And," she says, "it'll be five thousand every month, or I'll send you back to your fast lady friends. And more than

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

that, if you're satisfied I shall ask you for a slight rise."

The subject is not one that it would be easy to treat for the British stage, even nowadays. In France it was accepted for performance by the most difficult body of censors, the *Comité de Lecture* of the House of Molière. In France it is not the subject that matters, or that it is thought may corrupt morals, it is the way in which the subject is treated. Maupassant's favourite theme was the relations between the sexes, but he handled it in such a way and discussed it in such a refined tongue that to his countrymen and countrywomen (with the exception, perhaps, of Renan and his ilk) there was not the least offence in any of his writings. Nor would it appear from his universal popularity the world over, from Puritan America to Pagan Japan, is there any offence to men and women anywhere.

## CHAPTER XVI

Guy as a Civil Servant—An Ominous Report—Reasons for Unpopularity—Caricatures Himself—His Health Breaks Down—The Great Distress—Maupassant's Eyes—Puritanical Injustice—Innocent Victims—Catastrophe Almost Inevitable in Maupassant's Case—The Latest Pronouncements.

“**H**E is slack, without energy and I fear that his tastes and his capacities take him away from his administrative duties.” This is the ominous note sent into his superiors on Guy de Maupassant by the *chef de bureau* of the office in the Admiralty in which he was working, in 1877. In the following year the chief's report was even less favourable. Doubt was expressed on the young clerk's intellectual capacity, and against these words in the memorandum concerning him was entered the word “Ordinary.”

No doubt the worthy *chef de bureau* had a prejudice against the young man who so obviously held him, his superior, and his fellow-clerks in dislike and contempt. Maupassant's face could not conceal these feelings. Further, it was known that he “was writing in the papers,” a thing most detrimental to his popularity with his directors. Although exquisitely polite, his manner seemed to conceal something. His fellow-clerks, his superiors felt that he was watching them, that he was taking mental notes, that not one of their little habits, their little characteristics, their little

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

weaknesses was escaping those cold, "lookless" eyes. And this is exactly what was taking place. Maupassant during his life at the Ministry of Marine was storing his mind with observations on that curious genus the French Government clerk. "Maupassant," writes Monsieur de Monzie, "was very well aware of the feelings with which he inspired his bureau colleagues towards himself. He himself looked upon them with contemptuous pity, noting down, day by day, in his ferocious memory, their piteous attitudes and their asinine remarks."

In *En Famille*, in the story which was first called *Le Million* and which afterwards developed into *L'Héritage*, in *Une Partie de Campagne*, in *La Parure*, in *A Cheval* he draws on his storehouse of observations of his comrades in the office. He even caricatures himself in the personage in *l'Héritage*, whom he calls Boissel, "who lived as though in a novel by Alexander Dumas. Everything with him became an extraordinary adventure, and every morning he used to tell his pal, Pitolet, of the strange encounters he had made the night before, imaginary dramas that had taken place in his lodgings, screams from the street which had made him throw his windows open at twenty minutes past three in the morning. Every day he had separated men who were fighting, had stopped runaway horses and rescued women in danger. . . ." Maupassant with his Norman *hâblerie* had a habit of boasting of his adventures and prowesses. There was no harm meant by it. Somewhere

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

he writes that the "Normans are the Gascons of the North."

He was hard and pitiless in his descriptions of this class of men, and in consequence did not perhaps get the most out of his material. His stories of Government clerks do not compare favourably, for instance, with those by George Courteline on the same subject. The *Messieurs les Ronds-de-Cuir* of the latter—a great writer—reads as absolutely true to life as Maupassant's stories, but excites tolerant laughter where Maupassant provokes indignation and contempt. The father who allows his married daughter to take a lover—indeed, procures this lover for her—so that she may become a mother and thus inherit a large fortune left to her child by an aunt, and the husband who quietly accepts the situation and the fortune are no doubt types that could be found in Paris, but will not readily be accepted as fair delineations of French Government clerks, especially from the pen of a writer who in other stories, such as *La Parure*, shows us these mannikins as men of most punctilious honour. In *Les Bijoux*, again, when the widowed Government clerk discovers that the trinkets his wife has left behind are jewels of great value and surmises the way in which she had acquired these treasures . . . well, let Maupassant relate what happened :

"He had stopped short and remained standing in the middle of the road. Doubt, horrible doubt brushed him with its wing. She? But then all the other jewels had also been presents. It seemed to him that the ground beneath his feet was moving;

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

that a tree in front of him was falling to the ground ; he spread out his arms and collapsed, devoid of consciousness."

And curiously enough the husband who faints when he learns what his wife's real character had been, yet profits by the fruits of her conduct, was depicted in the same year (1884) as the father who sends a stallion lover to his daughter and the husband who accepts the offspring as his own with the money its birth brings into the family, both without a moment's scruple or hesitation.

Emile Faguet, a foremost critic, wrote of Maupassant : " He did not know how to paint anything that he had not seen with his own eyes. His brain was a machine for cutting things out of reality." Monsieur de Monzie thinks that the scenes he describes, and the sayings he quotes, had been observed and heard at the Ministry, and that Cazavan, Cache-lin, Torcheboeuf, " the handsome Maze," Pidolet and Boissel are all drawn from people whom it would have been easy to identify amongst " the wretched galley-slaves chained to the green despatch-boxes in cardboard." As to his père Savon, " famous for his conjugal misadventures," the butt and victim of the office " sports," he seems to be the standard type of the superannuated hack, for in Courteline's amusing book : *Messieurs les Ronds-de-Cuir* there is Le Père Soupe, in age and imbecility, the double of Maupassant's Père Savon. Both writers agree on the futility of most of the work performed by the clerks. Courteline writes, putting the words into the mouth

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

of one of the scribes, who has smuggled his girl into his room and who has been asked by her: "What's the use of all this?" "Nothing at all." The girl says: "You're not going to make me believe that you're paid for doing nothing but twirling your thumbs?" The clerk says: "You'll see. Listen! It's very curious. Some of us compose letters which mean nothing at all; others make fair copies of them. Thereupon the filing clerks come on the scene. These stamp the different documents in blue, enter the copies in a book and forward the letters and everything else to people who don't read a single word of them. And there you are. The office staffs cost the State several hundreds of millions." "Cheap enough," said Gabrielle.

Maupassant does not actually define his civil service work in such terms, but from his descriptions of the clerks at the Marine Office and of their way of spending their time in the office, conveys exactly the same impression.

As to which Monsieur de Monzie very justly remarks, writing of Maupassant as a civil servant:

"For ten years while he was groping for his path and for the form his art should take, uncertain poet, hesitating dramatist, story-teller and novelist not yet assured of his robust mastery, Maupassant found in the oubliettes of bureaucracy a shelter which enabled him to escape from the attempts and suggestions of literary Bohemianism. He was not forced to constrain himself to those hasty writings which render so many precious talents cheap and common. He was protected against himself, against those odious fits of impatience which pitch into the Fair of Letters so many premature writers.



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

He must be praised for the wise restraint which he practised for so many years and which was the condition of his glory."

In 1877, Maupassant's health broke down and he seemed so ill that his director at the office, M. Sabatier, applied to the Minister on his behalf for two months' leave of absence with full pay, on the grounds that, according to the Inspector-General of the Health Board, Guy de Maupassant, third-class clerk at the central administration, was in need of taking the waters at Louéche,\* in Switzerland. The leave was granted and Maupassant took the waters, which, of course, in no way improved his condition. He returned to the Ministry more poorly and more melancholy and dissipated than ever. Flaubert is anxious about his health. "I am hearing all sorts of stories about what's the matter with you," he wrote to

\* He seems to have amused himself in a curious way at Louéche. In a letter written to Zola by Flaubert on October 5th, 1877, the latter says: "Young — has been spending a month at the waters at Louéche and has defiled Helvetia with his obscenities. I have found lots of these written or carved in the Orne and Calvados departements. You even find them in the urinal at Bayeux Cathedral. This was the work of Messrs. the choristers or of the choir-boys." In the published correspondence the name is omitted, as above, but there is no doubt that Maupassant, who had been at Louéche the month previous, was named in the written letter. One might attribute this conduct to incipient insanity, especially the boasting to Flaubert about it, were it not a well-known fact that there being a fund of piggishness in many men and women, these get rid of it, in various ways, of which writing obscenities is one. From the graphiti at Pompeii, Herculaneum and Alexandria down to the short and simple annals of village amours that one sees on our walls the impulse was the same. Most literary folk, however, get rid of this perilous stuff in some work anonymous, or otherwise. Cleland emptied the lees of his soul into "Fanny Hill," and lived a clean life ever afterwards. And is it not recorded that the great George Sand collaborated with Alfred de Musset on a book, which . . . well, well, well."

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

him, "and I'd like you to see a man down here, Dr Fortin."

In the following year his reports on his health are still very alarming, and Flaubert advises him to consult Dr Pouchet. Maupassant complains about his eyes. These troubled him badly all his short life, and the hideous possibility of his becoming blind was one of his cruellest tortures at all times. It may be noted that for years before her death, his mother was totally blind. Eleven days after Maupassant's death, Goncourt makes the following entry in his Journal :

"I come back from Saint Gratien with Landolt, the oculist. We talk about Maupassant's eyes. Landolt says they were very good eyes, but were like two horses who could not be led nor driven in double harness—and that the mischief lay behind the eyes."

Everybody was talking about Maupassant just then and one wonders what was said about him, what Goncourt said about him, that day at Saint Gratien. From the aridity of Princess Mathilde's note to Lombroso—Princess Mathilde lived at Saint Gratien—one can guess at its tenour, which is hinted at in the note quoted above, for the same disease that in more than ninety per cent. of cases causes the general paralysis of the insane, from which Maupassant perished, also attacks "behind the eyes," atrophies the optic nerve.

Princess Mathilde, prim and prudish by nature, and by education taught to believe that those of royal

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

blood\* must uphold morality at any cost—a principle occasionally diverged from in royal houses, as history indicates—could not but feel reprobation for a man who had died from a disease, the almost invariable cause of which is an infection which theologians and Puritans describe as the shameful penalty of illicit sexual intercourse. As a matter of fact the infection may be taken by the most innocent and the purest. Some years ago, in a report made to the Academy of *Medécine* in Paris by a leading practitioner, the case was described of a child of four, belonging to an aristocratic family of the faubourg St. Germain, who developed a sore with an indurated base on his lip. The doctor was called in, and, to the horror and indignation of the parents, diagnosed the sore as the one that John Hunter of Calderwood gave his name to more than a hundred and fifty years ago. It transpired that the child's nurse had purchased for him one of those little toy balloons that one blows out and which whistle as the air escapes. This particular whistle had been used for demonstration by the hawker and had communicated the disease with which he was infected to the little boy of four. Again, a few years later, Dr Fournier of Cairo\* was called in to examine the four little sons of a Turkish prince. Their ages ranged from eleven to five. Each and all of them had the same kind of sore on their lips. In

\* She was the daughter of Jerome Buonaparte, by his bigamous union with the daughter of that adipose Duke of Wurtemberg, whom Napoleon created King in 1806 as Frederick I, and who, in 1813, naturally, betrayed his benefactor. (Nov. 2nd). Royal blood? Well, well.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

this case it had been caused by drinking from an earthenware jug that stood in the baobab's lodge, when the children were thirsty from playing in the sun in the palace courtyard. Hundreds of similar cases are known to every doctor, yet the prevailing opinion is still that the terrible disease is the punishment of sin and that those who suffer from it are undeserving of commiseration. This is doubtless the reason why people who have written about Maupassant think it necessary to tergiversate as to the causes of his long illness and its terrible dénouement, as though he needed any excuse or justification for having fallen a victim to the cruellest hazard that awaits the passer through life. One is asked to believe that excessive boating in his youth, overwork and excess of venery brought on the general paralysis which first sent him mad and then killed him, and there have been doctors to discuss this thesis! As a matter of fact, while some authorities put as the specific cause of general paralysis of the insane as in nine cases out of ten, the disease in question, as for instance the great Italian specialist whom Baron Lombroso consulted on the subject and who wrote: "*Nove volte su dieci c'è la sifilide di mezzo*," the most recent pronouncements of the experts in this hideous matter are to the effect that this disease is the *invariable* cause. Here is one of the very latest definitions of the paralysis from which Maupassant died, left, *ad usum delphini*, in the tongue in which it was formulated this very year, 1925 :

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

**"Progressive Paralyse, faelschlich Gehirnerweichung, eine der haeufigsten Geisteskrankheiten. Folge der Syphilis, mit unueberlegten Handlungen beginnend, unter geistl. Verfall und Laehmung in 2—5 Jahre zum Tode fuehrend."**

There is every kind of proof that this disease was the Great Distress that came into Maupassant's life somewhere about the year 1877, when he complains of his health and his chiefs send him to the waters. He is troubled about his eyes, doubtless long before he had any real cause for anxiety; he gives up smoking, which is the first thing that in such cases the doctor orders. One has read that at first he used to start his mornings on the river by smoking several pipes, one reads in the Rouen papers that at the luncheon served to the Flaubert Memorial Committee, Zola, Goncourt and Maupassant refused cigars, being none of them smokers. He never married, though in later years he used to say that the only reason why he sought for women's company was his dread of passing the nights alone in bed. He is always visiting spas, especially Aix-les-Bains, which in the ignorant old days was supposed to have in its waters a specific against the Neapolitan evil. Strictly according to the pathological schedule, he develops after a long lease of physical immunity though mental torture the symptoms of the paralysis whose sole cause is now definitely known. Doctor Glatz, who attended him at Champel in 1891, described him then as a "candidate for general paralysis." And finally, according to Lombroso, Maupassant had admitted to two doctors that he had formerly contracted the "bad disease."

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

It was a misfortune that was almost fatally certain to happen to a man of his physique and bringing up, without parental or religious restraint, a young man of bull-like strength and passion living alone in Paris and obliged by miserable poverty to the most hazardous associations, the most dangerous promiscuities. One has but to read *Mouche*, which describes one of these associations, to understand the reference to dangerous promiscuities. Here five men share the daily favours of one woman. In those days the nature and prophylaxis of the disease were unknown to the doctors, who only knew that it was curable because most of them had cases where patients had contracted the disease *ab initio*, twice and even three times. It was terribly rife in Paris during the twenty years that Maupassant lived there, the twenty years that preceded the discovery by Pasteur of the true causes of disease, the revolution in medical science, the blazing light thrown into the night of ignorance, blackmail and charlatanism. It is a pathetic thought that to-day Maupassant could have been rescued, Wassermanned, Hechted and arsphenamined into some sort of health once more.

Already, in 1882, this same Doctor Landolt had diagnosed what awaited Maupassant after examining his eyes. "This disorder, apparently insignificant" (the dilatation of the pupil of the eye), he wrote in a private letter, "caused me nevertheless to foresee, on account of the functional troubles which accompanied it, the lamentable end which awaited (ten years later)

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

the young writer formerly so vigorous and so valiant."

Maupassant's end and, worse than his release, the many years of self-torture which made his passing so very bad a one proceeded from this hapless contagion, taken doubtless during some Grenouillère gallantry in or about 1876, and from the hideous and warrantable dread that, knowing the nature of his illness, would beset this sensitive man so endowed with vivid imagination. He would have been warned by the first doctor whom he consulted to mistrust any and every symptom that might present itself—that used to be the first recommendation given by doctors in those days to patients of this category—the slightest spot, a trifling headache, fatigue of the eyes, transitory hardness of hearing, everything of the most innocent nature in others, but to him possibly the premonitory sign of fatal mischief. This explains fully the almost insane anxieties as to his health that in conversation, in his letters, in his constant visits to and changes of doctors, in his restlessness, constant movings and journeyings, this sane, level-headed, robust and placid man displayed during the dreadful sixteen years which began and ended his career. He had trained himself as a child to imagine himself an invalid and was therefore all the more disposed to let this imagination evolve the most terrifying visions. He absorbed drugs, supposed curative medicines, "as from," as Léon Daudet wrote, "a cornucopia." He discounted the horrors that awaited him, for the dis-

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

ease does give years of grace, and suffered in anticipation a thousand deaths. People who knew him in his quiescent period and saw him the picture of health and strength, bubbling with vitality and capable of amazing industry and production, could not believe in the acuteness of his sufferings. Flaubert pooh-poohs his "symptoms," his office chiefs put his slackness and inattention down to any cause but the right one.



## CHAPTER XVII

A Change of Offices—The Ministry of Public Instruction—  
His First Appearance There—A *Danse de Joie*—His  
Entire Absence of Zeal—Government Office Leisure—  
Where *Boule-de-Suif* was Written—Maupassant, Poet—  
His Volume: *Des Vers*—Prosecution Threatened—  
Lemaître on Maupassant.

**I**T is certain that in 1878 his superiors at the Admiralty were beginning to look askance at the young third-class clerk, who was understood to be frequenting literary people of subversive doctrines and to be using office stationery and office time for the composition of writings alien to the service of the State. It is not surprising then that Maupassant began to find his post "a hell." His constant complaints of the wretchedness of his existence prompted his good friend Flaubert to vigorous efforts on his behalf. It was obvious young Guy must not interrupt his career in the civil service, because he had at the time no other means whatever of subsistence, but it might be possible to get him transferred to a Ministry where the work would be more congenial and where his fellow-clerks might be men of greater intelligence. The Minister of Public Education and Fine Arts of the day was a friend of Flaubert's, Monsieur Agénor Bardoux, the confidant of Gambetta, orator of distinction and historian in the leisure that politics allowed him. It was said of him that he was proud to be addressed in the second person singular by the

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

author of *Madame Bovary* and would accordingly, it was thought, be inclined to act on any recommendation from his friend. It was he, by the way, who gave Zola his first decoration. Bardoux, however, did not wish to have any more young men of letters on his staff. He had had two recent unfortunate experiences of poets in the Republic. Flaubert persisted, and even tried to influence "friend Bardoux" by reading him some of Maupassant's verse. This might have proved ineffectual had there not been on Bardoux's staff a *chef de bureau* named Xavier Charmes, brother of the director of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, himself a man of literary taste and production and later a member of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences. To him also Flaubert reads his protégé's verses. Charmes is impressed and agrees to find work for Maupassant at the Ministry of Public Instruction. In January 1879, accordingly, third-class clerk Guy de Maupassant sends in his resignation to the Minister of Marine and enters the cabinet of the Grand Master of the University. Henry Roujon, who has published souvenirs of Maupassant, describes Maupassant's first entry into the Ministry of Public Instruction :

"One afternoon in 1878, whom did I see coming into my office at the direction of Primary Instruction? Maupassant in person, his face radiant.

"You?"

" 'Yes, I, in person. I've chucked the Admiralty. I become one of your comrades. Bardoux has attached me to his cabinet.'

"And he concluded with this formula, which in his mouth resumed something jolly and pleasant : 'A rum go, ain't it?'

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

"We commenced by dancing a wild jig round a desk transformed for the nonce into an altar to Friendship. After which we praised, as was seemly, Bardoux, minister and protector of letters. I seem to remember that Maupassant thought fit to wind up with a torrent of insults, poured forth in guise of farewell to his former chiefs at the Admiralty."

Norman *hâblerie*, by the way, for Maupassant to say he had been attached to the staff by the Minister. Xavier Charmes was only one year Maupassant's senior. He appointed him his secretary. Charmes was rapidly promoted and took Maupassant up with him. During the short time that Guy spent at this Ministry he was employed in some interesting correspondence. Charmes was very particular about the style and language of the letters that were sent out from his office and used to take the drafts home to correct them before handing them to the copyists. He was as particular as Flaubert as to the wording of the official sentences, and Maupassant may have benefited by his punctiliousness. Charmes would have liked to employ him to write reports on some of the vast subjects which came within the purview of the Public Instruction and Fine Arts, but met with stolid resistance from his secretary. "I am quite incapable," Maupassant used to say, "of writing anything but platitudes in the exercise of my official functions. It's the fault of the Admiralty work. The moment there is anything of an official nature in the work set me to write, the official style seizes hold of me and I cannot get rid of it." Accordingly, at his request, he was exclusively employed in keeping the registers up to

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

date and in ordinary routine office work. Monsieur de Monzie mentions that in the same office was employed as copyist the exquisite author of *Lèvres Closées*, Léon Dierx, then a man of forty, who refused all promotion and remained until the very last on the lowest rung of the official ladder in the humble rôle of expéditionnaire. He wanted the leisure to write his verses and an entire freedom from responsibility and care. Maupassant likewise avoided the display of any sort of zeal. It is said that he was usually absent three days a week. He seems to have realized in his person the man, whom Courteline wrote about, the civil servant, "who would not go to his office." His health was bad, really bad, and this furnished a ready excuse for his constant non-attendances. And most of the time he spent at the Ministry in the rue de Grenelle, in a damp room on the ground floor, a room which he has described in one of his stories, was employed in literary composition. According to Monsieur de Monzie, it was on *Boule-de-Suif*, his first masterpiece, that he was working, whenever his social engagements gave him any leisure, and that most of this immortal story was composed, drafted, written, re-written, polished and re-polished in this room in the rue de Grenelle. He kept the writing of it a secret even from Flaubert, wishing perhaps to surprise him.

His poetry had attracted attention and his mother, knowing that he was now earning money by his contributions, under various pseudonyms, to the press,

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

consulted Flaubert as to whether it might not be advisable for him to leave the civil service, where he was so badly paid and where the work was so uncongenial, even at the Public Instruction Office. "Not yet," answered Flaubert. "We mustn't make a failure (*un raté*) of him." Maupassant himself, with true Norman cautiousness, had the intention of clinging to his post until it was abundantly clear to him that he could live without it, and when he did resign at last it was with the stipulation that if he chose he might return to his post within a year. From 1878 on, he was contributing more or less regularly to a great number of papers, including such important Paris publications as *Le Figaro*, *le Gaulois*, *l'Echo de Paris* and *Gil Blas*. It was during these incursions into newspaperdom that he collected his materials for *Bel-Ami*, the most characteristic and perhaps the most interesting of his longer works. For the physical portrait of the hero, George Duroy, he drew on his brother Hervé, for his moral vileness on a variety of newspaper men. It is a composite portrait, the elements of which were easily recognizable at the time. The two women who figure as the mistress and the wife of Duroy were two women who had thrown themselves at Guy's head during the first days of his success and reputation. His standing as a poet already, in 1878, may be gauged from the fact that the young civil servant was often asked to exclusive *salons*—there to recite his latest poem. These poems, such as *La Dernière Escapade* and *La Vénus*

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

*Rustique*,\* had been considered good enough to offer, the first to the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and the latter to Madame Adam's *Nouvelle Revue*. Neither was accepted, but the fact that Flaubert, Tourguéneff and other great men did their best to induce editor and editress to open their pages to Guy de Maupassant shows the esteem in which his work was held. After *Boule de Suif* had given him a universal reputation, both these reviews solicited his collaboration.

In 1880 Maupassant published, in a volume entitled *Des Vers* (Verses), the best of his poems. The public prosecutor in a small town near Paris called Etampes went out of his way to give this volume a most valuable advertisement and send-off by prosecuting the author for publishing what in an English police-court would be called an "obscene libel." This was the poem *Le Mur*, which is the first poem in the volume *Des Vers*. It had originally been published in the *Revue Moderne et Naturaliste*, edited by Harry Alis. This *Revue* was printed in Etampes by a printer called Allieu. Alis had vigorously edited and blue-pencilled Maupassant's poem, which provoked Flaubert into saying: "They have ruined, demolished, half of it." Allieu owned a small weekly, also published at Etampes, and thought fit to publish the suppressed passages from *Le Mur* in this sheet. In an italicized note he pointed out the nature of these excerpts and

\* As to this poem; Armand Silvestre wrote in 1892 that he considered Maupassant's immortality might derive from it and that his admiration for *Une Vénus Rustique* made him almost regret that its author had ever taken to prose writing, magnificent as had been his achievement in this field.

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

invited the prosecution of the author. The public prosecutor promptly responded and a summons was issued against Guy de Maupassant. The press-agents of modern "best-sellers" would have welcomed with pæans of joy such a foolish move on the part of the authorities. Maupassant, however, was extremely perturbed. Might not this prosecution injure him in the eyes of his civil service seniors, might it not even cause him to lose his much reviled but cherished employment? The actual wording of the summons charged Guy de Maupassant "with outraging morals and public morality." It was issued in the February of his *annus mirabilis*. Even Flaubert, who at first had looked on the matter from the point of view of the press-agent, grew nervous on reflection. On the 13th of February he writes to Maupassant: "Lapierre sends me yesterday's *Événement*, from which I see that M. Guy de Maupassant is to be prosecuted for obscene verses. I should be delighted at this, dear son of mine, did I not fear the prudery of your Government office. It's perhaps going to bring bothers down on you." Flaubert then set to work to pull all manner of strings in his protégé's favour. Grevy, afterwards President of the Republic, was enlisted, so was Wilson, his son-in-law; so were a number of senators; so was Madame Adam, and finally so was Bardoux. His letter to his "darling," describing his movements and urging him to neglect nothing on his side, is worth quoting. Here are the essential parts of it:

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

"Every possible influence must be used to hush the matter up. The only thing to be feared, isn't that so, is your dismissal from the ministry? In consequence let us bring pressure to bear on justice first of all and then on the Public Instruction.

"(1) Go to Commanville's and get him to beg Simonot to speak for you to Grévy or to Wilson.

"(2) Here's a letter for Cordier, senator. Cordier is very powerful and disposes of a group at the Senate.

"(3) Another for the poet Laurent-Pichat, senator, who was prosecuted for having published *Madame Bovary*.

"(4) But before anything else, *nom de Dieu*, go to d'Osmoy's. He's splendid for things like this.

"(5) Go and see Bardoux also. Moreover I'm going to write him a stinger.

"(6) On the pretext of getting back your poems go and see Madame Adam and tell her your story. I think she's a good sort at heart. Send Pouchet to her first.

"(7) Vacquerie has always told me that *Le Rappel* was at my service. I'm going to test this. But once more I say we mustn't irritate Messrs the Magistrates at present."

Agénor Bardoux, the Minister, was, however, Flaubert's trump-card. Flaubert had read him Maupassant's *Au Bord de l'Eau* when he was canvassing for him, and moreover, twenty-three years previously, a certain Agénor Brady had published a volume of poems himself also, entitled *Loin du Monde*. Agénor Brady was Agénor Bardoux and he liked writers, though preferably not as civil servants in his department. It is said that it was his intervention that got the matter hushed up and the summons withdrawn. That amusing journalist, Aurelien Scholl, who was with the party who visited London with Emile Zola, in 1893, and who was one of the wittiest of boulevardiers, was also very active on Maupassant's behalf. He had a fine estate near Etampes and could use local



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

influence on the local bench. This he did and won Maupassant's gratitude. When *Des Vers* was published Maupassant sent him a copy accompanied by the following letter :

" Sir,

" At the time when I was being prosecuted by the bench at Etampes, you spontaneously gave me proof of great benevolence and were of great assistance to me.

" I hope that my book of poems, which I am publishing to-day, will not displease you, because the only poem in it that you know (*Le Mur*) seemed good to you.

" Should this be so, may I venture to ask you for a little more help on behalf of this book, a beginner's, who has so much to fear from the public's indifference for poetry. Your name is so well known and your authority is so powerful that a word from you would assure me of readers.

" Receive, I beg you, Sir, with the assurance of my vivid gratitude, the expression of my most devoted sentiments.

" GUY DE MAUPASSANT."

Scholl afterwards met Maupassant and made him laugh by telling him that what was remarkable about Etampes was that it was the nearest point to Paris at which the cuckoo was heard, as that bird had too much consideration for the feelings of the married men in the metropolis to come any closer. Maupassant frequently quoted this joke of Aurelien Scholl's.\*

Flaubert was much too good a man of business to let Maupassant miss the publicity of the affair once the legal proceedings had been disposed of and the

\* Although a hater of neologisms and manufactured words, Maupassant in gratitude to Scholl, created the word *scholliste*, meaning a reader and admirer of Aurelien Scholl's newspaper articles. This word may be found in the story: *Un Echec*, which derives from Maupassant's voyage to Corsica.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

public was taken into his confidence. There was an article in Vacquerie's *Rappel*, there was a slashing letter in the *Gaulois*, an open letter to Guy. This letter was reprinted with a preface in the third and subsequent editions of the poems. Flaubert seems to have been under the impression that the *corpus delicti* was the poem *Au Bord de l'Eau*, whereas it was *Le Mur* which had shocked the susceptibilities of the Etampes Bench. Maupassant in his preface does not refer to this error, but implies that it was *Au Bord de l'Eau* that was considered the "obscene libel," this no doubt so as not to lose the benefit of Flaubert's letter. He states that the reason why he publishes it "is once more to place my book under his protection, which while he lived covered me as with a magic shield against which the sentences of the magistrates did not dare to aim their blows." In this same preface—which was not afterwards republished—he says also: "I do this as a supreme homage to that Dead One who assuredly took away with him the keenest affection that I shall feel for any man, the greatest admiration that I shall vouchsafe to any writer and the most absolute veneration that I shall ever be inspired with by any human being no matter who he may be."

The volume of poems was dedicated "To Gustave Flaubert, To the Illustrious and Paternal Friend whom I love with all my affection, to the Irreproachable Master whom I admire before all others."

The first poem in this volume is this *Le Mur*, which is printed as bowdlerized by Harry Alis. The story

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

was of a gallant adventure in a park by moonlight, the gestures of an amatory couple being thrown in grotesque silhouettes on a wall behind them. The book was published by Charpentier, on the urgent and repeated solicitations of Flaubert, and appeared in April, 1880. There were three editions within two months, but alas! the third edition came after Flaubert was no more. A fourth edition was published by Havard in 1884, with Maupassant's portrait etched by Le Rat. Copies of this edition are very rare, as any that Maupassant or his friends could get hold of were suppressed, because of Maupassant's later aversion from having his portrait published in any shape or form. Later on there were two editions published by Ollendorff, and there have been others since. The one that is on the market to-day is published by Flammarion. It is a volume of 228 pages and contains Flaubert's open letter and nineteen poems, including *Le Mur*, *Au Bord de l'Eau*, *La Dernière Escapade* and *Vénus Rustique*. Flaubert worked hard for its success, writing to all his friends to recommend it. He writes to Maupassant: "Bring me next week a list of the idiots who write reviews, said to be literary, in the papers. We will then set up our batteries. But remember good Horace's old maxim, *Oderunt poetas*. My letter for Banville will get to Paris to-night."

Maupassant's success as a prose-writer was so overwhelming that his achievements as a poet were overlooked and forgotten. On this subject there is interest-



Je me suis fait une loi  
absolue de ne jamais laisser  
publier mon portrait  
toutes les fois que je peux  
s'empêcher. des exceptions  
n'ont eu lieu que par  
surprise. Nos œuvres ap-  
partiennent au public, mais  
pas nos figures.

*Guy de Maupassant*

FACSIMILE OF MAUPASSANT'S DECLARATION OF AVERSION FROM HAVING HIS  
PORTRAIT PUBLISHED, WITH A FAKED PICTURE OF HIM AS HE WAS AT THE  
TIME OF WRITING "NOTRE CŒUR."



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

ing testimony from Jules Lemaître, poet, dramatist and critic, a member of the French Academy and one of the most prominent men of letters in France in the last half-century. For years he had the notion that Maupassant was only a poet of sorts. In several passages in his "Contemporains" will be found and should be consulted his account of how at first mistaken about the man's genius, he gradually came to appreciate him at his full worth. A fine passage recants his blame of Maupassant's pessimism, which he had ridiculed but which he now explains and deplores.

Lemaître on Maupassant, should be read by those who, in despite of Pascal's warning, feel inclined to blame Maupassant for his choice of certain subjects and his matter-of-fact, unmoralizing way of dealing with them. The following is an essential passage, which may be opposed to such criticisms, common enough in lands where English is spoken. Lemaître writes :

" . . . . From the very beginning as a writer, he considers love and the comings and goings connected with love with the same eye as all other natural phenomena (and he's jolly well right, too) and holds that these phenomena of love and love-making should be described without embarrassment or hesitation. And all the same, being young and having blood like a countryman's, a sailor's, a hunter's flowing in his veins, he frequently shows a predilection for carnal pictures—be it that he brings to these subjects the spirit of antique naturalism; or the pessimistic bitterness which for the last twenty years has been fashionable. It was touch and go with him at his start whether or not to make a speciality of certain subjects and to instal his principal seat of observation in a Maison Tellier."

## CHAPTER XVIII

*Boule-de-Suif*—Hoaxing the Critics—Flaubert's Enthusiasm—Maupassant's Loss—Great Success—He Cuts Himself Adrift—Maupassant at Thirty—His First *Nouvelles*—The Origin of *La Maison Tellier*—Its Real Location—A Hideous Traffic—Tourgueneff's Tip.

**O**N April 17th, 1880, there appeared in *Le Gaulois*, in the form of an open letter to the editor, an article on the writer's literary creed with an account of how a certain book, to be known as *Les Soirées de Médan*, to which that writer was a contributor and which was very shortly to be published by Charpentier, had come to be written. This letter was signed Guy de Maupassant. Here is the part about the forthcoming book :

"We found ourselves together, in the summer, at Zola's country-place at Médan. During the long periods of digestion after long meals (for we are all very gourmand and very gourmet (gluttonous and epicurean) and Zola, all on his own, eats like three ordinary novelists) we used to converse. Zola used to tell us about his future novels, his literary opinions and his ideas on everything. Sometimes he would take his gun, which he handles like the short-sighted man he is, and whilst talking to us would fire at tufts of grass which we had assured him were birds and used to be considerably surprised not to find any quarry to his markmanship.

"Some days we used to fish with rod and line. Hennique distinguished himself at this to Zola's great despair, as he himself caught nothing but sticklebacks.

"As for me I used to lie full length in the boat called *Nana*, or would spend hours in bathing, while Paul Alexis prowled round with flirtatious thoughts and Huysmans smoked cigarettes and Céard bored himself, finding the country ever so tedious.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

"Thus our afternoons were spent; but as the nights were magnificent, warm, redolent of the smell of the leaves, we used to go every evening for a stroll on the *big island*, opposite the house.

"It was I who used to ferry them all across.

"Now, one night when the moon was full, we were speaking about Mérimée, Mérimée of whom the ladies say: 'What a charming story-teller he is!' Huysmans said, almost in these very words: 'A story-teller is a gent, who not knowing how to write, peddles out in a pretentious manner a lot of piffle.'

"So we ran over the names of all the celebrated story-tellers and sang the praises of *viva voce raconteurs*, the most marvellous of whom, as far as we know, is that great Russian Tourguéneff, that master who is almost French. Paul Alexis said that it is very difficult to write a story. Céard, who is a sceptic, looked at the moon and murmured: 'Now there's a fine romantic stage setting. One ought to make use of it.' Huysmans added: 'to tell sentimental tales.' Zola, however, thought it a good idea and suggested that we should tell each other stories. The idea made us all laugh and we agreed, so as to increase the difficulty of the task, that the setting chosen by the first to tell a story, should be used by each of the others for the scene of the different adventures they were to narrate.

"We went and sat down and in the great calm of the drowsing fields under the dazzling light of the moon, Zola told us that terrible page of the sinister history of wars which is entitled: *L'Attaque du Moulin*.

"When he had finished we all cried out: 'You must write that out and quickly.' He laughed and said: 'That's already been done.'

"It was my turn on the following evening.

"Huysmans on the next evening amused us very much with an account of the misadventures of a *moblot* without enthusiasm.

"Céard in telling us the story of the siege of Paris over again with novel explanations unfolded a tale full of philosophy, always probable, if not always true. For if woman eternally inspires men to do foolish things, the warriors whom she favours more specially, naturally suffer worse consequences from her interest in them than do the others.

"Hennique once more demonstrated that men often intelligent and reasonable when taken separately, become brutes



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

infallibly when they are in numbers—it's what one might call the 'mob intoxication.' I don't know anything funnier and at the same time more horrible than the siege of that brothel and the massacre of the strumpets—poor girls.

"But Paul Alexis made us wait four days, not finding a subject. He wanted to tell us stories of Prussians defiling corpses. Our exasperation made him close his mouth and he ended up by evolving the amusing anecdote of the great lady who goes to pick up the dead body of her husband killed in battle and lets herself be 'moved' by a poor, wounded soldier. And this soldier turns out to be a priest!

"Zola found the stories curious and suggested that we should make a book of them. That book is about to appear."

According to Maynial, Maupassant had not written a word of *Boule-de-Suif* when he told it to his friends at Médan. That is quite possible, but no doubt he had long carried it round in his head, from the days when he had seen, or heard of, Adrienne on her way to meet her lover in Havre at the inn at Tôtes, and had reflected on the different people of his acquaintance who might be made to play a part in the satire which he had determined to write. Each member of the diligence party had been selected as a distinctive type of bourgeoisdom, male or female, from people known to him, and every one of the *Boule-de-Suif* party was afterwards recognized in Rouen. Cornudet was, of course, Maupassant's uncle, Cord'homme. This worthy took great umbrage at having been shown to the world in such a light, and never forgave his nephew. One wonder in what form the story was told to Zola and his disciples on that Médan evening. It cannot have been in any respect the story as it afterwards dazzled the world, because it was not till after

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

the book had been published, and Zola had read it, that he formed any opinion on Maupassant's power as a story-teller. His enthusiastic admiration for the work, the draft of which had been told him *viva voce*, is on record, but he makes no allusion whatever to having been present at the telling of the story. Nor do any of other others. The fact is that this letter in the *Gaulois*, which appeared on the day on which the book was published, was one of poor Guy's practical jokes, a practical joke on the critics. It is a purely fantastic description of how the book came to be planned. The truth was that the idea came to one of Zola's friends amongst the young writers who used to visit him at Médan, that a volume of short stories, one from the pen of each of the *intimes*, would be a pleasant memorial of their friendship. The stories were read to the contributors—with the exception of Zola—by the different authors, and the universal pronouncement was—one in which Zola afterwards concurred—that Maupassant's story was by far the best. Zola only made the acquaintance of *Boule-de-Suif* after Charpentier had published the book. Two days after the letter in the *Gaulois*, the book having simultaneously come into the reviewers' hands, Maupassant had the joy of seeing that his shaft had pierced the armour of the fiercest reviewer in all Paris. This was the formidable Albert Wolff, of *Le Figaro*, whose dictum in those days could make or mar a literary reputation. This is what Wolff wrote on *Les Soirées de Médan*, in the form of a paragraph in his *Courrier*

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

*de Paris*, on April 19th, 1880, a paragraph that he spent the rest of his life in regretting :

" The *bourgeois* of Médan (Zola) has sometimes good sense, not always. Here he has been taking under the protection of his name a series of short stories, of no importance whatever, which the young people about him have entitled : *Les Soirées de Médan*. A pretentious title which seems to imply that the pretty village between Poissy and Triel is as widely known as the capitals of Europe. For the benefit of my country and foreign readers I must say a word about Médan. Zola has built a country-house there where he lives during eight months in the year surrounded by his flatterers, spending the other four months of the year in Paris in the society of the same young people who call him ' dear master ' in the expectation of hailing him as the Great Citizen of Médan. These young people really believe that the mere presence of Zola at Médan will henceforth place this village amongst the historical places in France, and that Zola's house should be visited with the same interest as the Palace of Versailles or the Castle of Blois. It may be even that they are soliciting the Minister to arrange that the administration of the Beaux-Arts should issue tickets of admission to tourists to visit Zola's cottage, just as is done for the Gobelins, the Cluny Museum and the Sèvres manufactory.

" The naiveté of these young people equals their pretentiousness. One of them, Maupassant, in the *Gaulois* has publicly confessed how this volume of short stories came into existence. The story is curious. Behold them one summer evening under the trees. One has just taken a swim in the river, another has been walking about the country with flirtatious ideas in his head. Just think of that ! They are all lying on their backs, contemplating the stars which shine up there. Mérimée's name is mentioned. ' C'est un imbécile,' remarks one of the little naturalists. Another yawns and says that the country bores him. That is what they think and that is how they write. And it is this little group of young prigs who in a most insolent preface throw down the glove to the critics. But old birds are not to be caught with chaff. Their idea was : ' Let's get ourselves slated, that will help to sell the book.' I trust that my confrères who have grown grey in harness will not let

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

themselves be taken in by such a schoolboy's trick. *Les Soirées de Médan* are not worth a line of criticism. With the exception of Zola's story, with which the book opens, the stories are of the last mediocrity."

"Wolff's article fills me with joy," wrote Flaubert to Maupassant on reading the review in the *Figaro*. "Oh, the eunuchs!"

This is in the letter in which he tells Guy that he has re-read *Boule-de-Suif* and that he maintains his opinion that it is a masterpiece. In an undated letter written about the same time, he exclaims: "Eight editions of the *Soirées de Médan*! The 'Three Tales' only have had four. I shall be getting jealous."

This latter letter precedes, in the published *Correspondance de Flaubert*, the very last letter he wrote to Maupassant that has been published. It is dated April 16th. In this letter he tells him to go and see Madame Adam, asks him if he has been to see Princess Mathilde, and adds:

"(3) Tell Charpentier to send me two copies of the *Soirées de Médan*, one to lend out and the other to give away, without counting my own copy which I hope to receive to-morrow."

This letter begins "My darling" and concludes by saying that he hopes in a week "to have a visit from Doctor Pouchet, who will give me particulars about your illness, which I don't understand at all well." The last letters in this book, many of which were undated, appear not to be in chronological order and confuse one as to when *Boule-de-Suif* in volume form got into Flaubert's hands. The above letter is the

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

last but one in the book, the last being a letter to Madame des Genettes, dated April 18th, in which he defends Zola, whose *Nana* the lady had apparently attacked. Zola, he says, "is a colossus with dirty feet, but a colossus for all that." He ends this letter by saying: "I am bustling myself so as not lose a minute and I feel tired to the very marrow of my bones." These are the last words of the "good giant's" published letters. Three weeks later he was dead. He had just lived long enough to see the success of his pupil, both as a poet and as a story-writer, but he cannot have realized the triumph that awaited him, a triumph that for ten years was to grow and grow.

Flaubert died suddenly on the morning of May 8th, 1880, and the same evening Maupassant arrived at the Croisset. With his own hands he washed the dead body of his master and prepared it for the grave. "Without phrases, without any gestures, without cries, without tears, his heart steeped in respect," is how his manner is described by one who was near him at the time. Later on in the evening he was seen re-reading Flaubert's last letters to him, including the one in which he was told to try and write twelve stories as good as *Boule-de-Suif* and that then he would be a man. This dying behest was religiously obeyed by him, but it was not twelve such stories that he wrote, but twelve times twelve. His grief at the death of his friend and master was very deep, though he displayed no theatrical emotion. He mourned him all through his short life, and in a lucid moment wrote

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

from the madhouse to a friend, saying : " I am always thinking about my poor Flaubert, and say to myself that I would like to be dead if I were sure that someone would think of me in the same way." In several passages in his writings he paid tribute to the master, from whom he had at least learned to take a lofty pride in the craft of letters, then as ever contemned of the *bourgeoisie*, and because of this high esteem not to spare any sacrifice of time or labour to produce the best and the best only. He also learned from Flaubert to despise all those who think basely. He learned from him certain things that were to be avoided in the practice of writing, but his indebtedness as a writer did not go beyond this. According to Taine, who described him as the only man in France who was able to create, he was even more highly gifted than Flaubert.

No doubt what first attracted public attention to the new boulevard yellow-back was that it was published by Zola's publisher and was known to contain a short story by the great man. That got the necessary number of copies into the hands of the public, and in twenty-four hours the names "*Boule-de-Suif*" and "Guy de Maupassant" were in everybody's mouth. The hideous Albert Wolff, walking to and fro the *Figaro* office in the rue Drouot, had daily for some days the bitter spectacle of crowds assailing the huge piles of the yellow-back heaped up on the stands outside the several booksellers' shops that in those days one passed on one's way down the boulevards towards the

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

Madeleine. Everybody said that Maupassant's story was by far the best. Zola himself admitted it. There was never any discussion of the matter. It had all the elements of popularity. It put on the stage the courtesan, who with the cuckold has always been the most popular character in the French story from Brantôme onwards. It pitted her against a Prussian brute and flattered and justified the hatred against men of that nation which still burned brightly in the hearts of the French. The pictures of the various members of the diligence party were found so very lifelike, people that everyone knew, everyone had met, common types yet here each characterized and distinct. There was no fine writing. The interesting tale was told as a man might tell it over a dinner table, a man who was a master of the language as it is spoken. There was no moralizing. One of the characters describes the Prussian as a "cochon," but the author does not express himself one way or the other on his conduct. The only comment that is emphasized is where Cornudet tells the supper-party as he rushes out of the room that they have done an infamous thing, but the whole effect of this moralizing is spoilt by the revelation that Cornudet is vexed and jealous because Boule-de-Suif had repulsed his, Cornudet's, advances. And the exposure of the meanness, selfishness and cruelty of the *bourgeois* was so delightful, so true, so exactly what one would expect from people of that sort: this is what every reader would say to himself realizing the truth of the picture

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

from the conviction of his subconscious self that he or she would under similar circumstances have acted in the same way exactly. With the saving exception, of course, that none of them would have let poor *Boule de Suif* starve at the end. Every reader felt that he would have shared his supper with the poor girl, and that that was because he or she was so very much superior a *bourgeois* to the *bourgeois* that Maupassant had painted. One is always delighted to hear of the misfortunes of others, wrote a great French cynic, who, being debarred from writing memoirs, wrote maxims. By "misfortunes" he meant not only evil happenings but the revelation of evil and contemptible qualities. The reader loves to recognize himself in a character in a novel or story, if the author is skilful enough to endow this character with qualities so base that the reader will find satisfaction and complacency in comparing himself with his fictive double. As a matter of fact, though the final vileness of the diligence party largely contributes to the success of the story, it is, unlike all the rest, exaggerated and untrue to average human nature. If only merely to show their superiority, each one of them would have offered food to *Boule-de-Suif*. The letting her starve is unbelievable, but the account of it helps to flatter the reader, who feels convinced that he, in such a case, while disapproving of *Boule-de-Suif's* morality and most recent lapse, would have come to the rescue and comfort of her empty stomach.

*Boule-de-Suif* was so immense a success that Mau-



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

passant felt that he could now turn his back on the hated civil service. Flaubert was no longer there to warn him against precipitation, but perhaps because of his remembrance of the master's warnings Maupassant proceeded in the matter of cutting himself adrift from an assured position and a small but certain income with extreme caution. He asked for a year's leave. He asked it in a manner that was "correct, deferential and discreet." He showed himself "discreet and timid" when he approached Monsieur Charmes and explained that though his ambition was and always had been to live the quiet and adventureless life of a Government official with a fixed income, he still would like to try his fortune in this new career which had so suddenly thrown its double-doors wide open for his *grandes entrées*. "But," he added, "my health is poor and the profession of letters is haphazardous. If some illness or some piece of bad luck obliged me to take such a step, I should like to be able to find here once more my post and my salary." Charmes readily granted this request and Maupassant was put *en disponibilité*, on the unattached list, where, says Monsieur de Monzie, "he would have remained to his dying day," had not some years' later a punctilious Minister decided that "this sort of thing" could not go on, and instructed Monsieur Xavier Charmes to tell Maupassant that he must either come back to his job as writer to the Public Instruction and Fine Arts at a salary of £90 a year, or must definitely resign. Charmes saw Maupassant, who was then

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

writer for Public Instruction and Delight and the lovers of the Finest Art, at a salary certainly not less than two or three thousand a year, told him what the Minister had said, and relates that even then Maupassant signed his resignation with expressions of regret at the loss of his official position.

At the very time when he was describing his health as bad to Monsieur Charmes he was seen by Monsieur Tancrède Martel, contemporary poet and author, who in 1880 was introduced to Maupassant by Henri Céard. Monsieur Martel was taken by Céard to a luncheon to which Maupassant had invited him. His account of his meeting with the author of *Boule-de-Suif* is as follows :

" Maupassant was living in the rue Clauzel, a house inhabited by clerks and people of the lower middle-class. Towards eleven o'clock we saw him buying *his paper*" (Martel underlines these words to show that Maupassant practised the cautious economy of the people he was living amongst, buying one paper only every morning and calling it "his paper") "as he used to do every morning at a stationer's shop in the place Bréda, since called place Henri Monnier. When we were introduced to each other Maupassant accepted my enthusiastic compliments from pure courtesy. . . . We lunched at the Faisan restaurant in the rue des Martyrs. Maupassant ate with a superb appetite and drank like a Norman. He was then a splendid looking fellow of about thirty, of middle height, stockily built, with a pleasing face, wearing a heavy black moustache, with bright eyes, a round and rosy face and a small and sensuous nose. To sum up : splendid in health ; but his boating gave him occasional mornings of great fatigue. He had muscles, wit and go. Like Céard he was still quill-driving in a Ministry.

" Certainly he was aware of his own marvellous talent, but he seemed to me devoid of literary ambition and especially

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

lacking in that enthusiasm characterizing the great contemporary writers whom I had met. . . . Our conversation was chiefly about Flaubert who had died in the previous month of May and I shall always remember the emotion with which Maupassant extolled the genius, the kindness of 'his master and initiator.'"

M. Martel relates that during that luncheon, Maupassant spoke with great enthusiasm about Napoleon and described him and Joan of Arc as "two immense *types*" (a slang expression which may be rendered by the English word "lots," or "uns," or by the American word "guys"—disrespectful).

Maupassant looked the picture of robust health as Martel saw him and everyone else who at that time came into contact with him. But *he* knew. He knew the snake that was gnawing at his heart. One of the hideous features of the evil that had selected him as one of its most deplorable victims is that the work of destruction goes on relentlessly inside out of sight, with no outward, visible sign of the ghastly ruin that under this smiling exterior is being performed by myriads of invisible spiral-shaped germs darting to and fro in marrow, cell and brain. Indeed it may be repeated that there is a recent theory, not controverted so far, that the intoxication of the system by this virus produces at first and for some time an extraordinary stimulation, both physical and mental, of the whole doomed organism, similar to the intoxication and stimulation of well-known drugs and that not only may the victims show outwardly as of florid health but that their brains are for a time capable of extra-

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

ordinary production of far higher merit than they would ever have been capable of without this inoculation. On this subject Léon Daudet, the Royalist editor, who is not only a great writer but also a doctor and man of science, has written books of consummate interest. It is a curious fact that between the years 1876 and 1880 Maupassant leaped from a level of mediocre authorship—as illustrated in the stories published at that time—to the supreme mastery of *Boule-de-Suif*. There was some tremendous stimulation of the brain-cells here. What can it have been?

Having entered the literary firmament, as he afterwards described it, "like a meteor" and being the most-talked-off writer in Paris in the summer of 1880, Maupassant was assailed on every side by demands from editors. At that time he had a long novel on the stocks, *Une Vie*, the plot of which had been submitted to Flaubert and greatly approved of by him. But having left the Civil Service and having to look now exclusively to his pen for a living, Maupassant first turned his attention to the writing of shorter pieces, articles and stories which could be produced in a few hours and for which payment was immediate. He accordingly made one or two agreements with leading newspapers, the *Gaulois* amongst others, to contribute *chroniques* and *nouvelles*. Though it was now abundantly clear to him that he had a fortune in his pen, he did not allow his great success to turn his head for a single moment. He proceeded with the utmost caution. It was not for some months that he

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

left his miserable room in the rue Clauzel, or ceased to dine at the cheap restaurants of the Montmartre quarter. He knew what the boulevard life would cost him and has described it in *Bel-Ami*, where George Duroy finds that though he has sprung from an income of £5 a month to £40 he is often quite penniless long before the end of the thirty days.

“He used sometimes to ask himself how he had managed to spend an average of one thousand francs a month, without any excess or indulging in any caprice, and he established the fact that adding the cost of a lunch at eight francs to a dinner at twelve taken in some big café on the boulevards he was spending a louis, which added to ten francs pocket-money, that money which vanishes without one’s knowing where or how, forms a total of thirty francs. Now thirty francs a day make nine hundred francs at the end of the month. And he didn’t include in that all the expenses on clothes, washing, boots and linen, etc.”

The year of his great success, 1880, was a lean year for him. Royalties from *Boule-de-Suif* would be almost insignificant, the forty or fifty centimes a copy which the book would earn as being one of Zola’s works in part having to be divided among the six contributors. The sale of a whole edition would barely give him £4. But his agreements with the papers gave him an income that sufficed his modest requirements, of which boating excursions were perhaps the most expensive, and so necessities being provided for he settled down to real hard work. This year, 1880, saw the preparation or elaboration of some of his finest work: *En Famille*, *L’Histoire d’Une Fille de Ferme*, *Le Papa à Simon* (inspired by Zola’s

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

blacksmith Goujet), *La Femme de Paul* (perhaps the only story in which Maupassant touches on abnormal vice) and the immortal *Maison Tellier*. As to this last, one of the most successful of Maupassant's stories, it was claimed by Hector Malot, as he was driving away from Maupassant's funeral that the subject of it had been supplied by him. The fact is that it was a Rouen journalist called Charles Lapierre who had told Maupassant how the *personnel* of a brothel in the rue des Cordeliers had attended a first communion service at the church of Bois-Guillaume. Maupassant changed the venue from Rouen to Fécamp, as the vice of a small town is better material than the mechanical debauchery of a big city, for the play of satire. Also, the simple, village church made a much better setting for the awakening of religious emotion in the hearts of the strumpets than would have done the large, pompous, suburban parish church, where the small crowd from the Maison Tellier would have passed unnoticed in a large congregation. He also changed the end as Lapierre had told it to him, for as a matter of fact the mistress when she had got the women home, being anxious to give them a feal treat sent each poor wretch off to a bed, that for that night at least was to be hers in privacy. Maupassant sacrifices what would have been a masterly finale for the sake of showing the girls momentarily sanctified plunged back into the mire with the male swine, their sty-companions, in the forms of the respectable citizens of the little port. In

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

this story he seems deliberately to have shut out the pity that was in his heart, the pity that showed itself that same year in *Le Papa à Simon* and in *L'Histoire d'Une Fille de Ferme*, in the latter of which he makes a peasant of the same class as Le Père Amable (who hangs himself rather than see persons not of his blood feeding in his house) cheerfully adopt the illegitimate son of his own wife, the pity that must have been in that heart for the wretched denizens of the evil houses of that rue des Cordeliers, formerly rue du Temple, which he knew well and where he had in his early manhood spent many hours of observation and sociological study. In those days the lot of the women in these Maisons Tellier, these *Maisons de Tolérance*, was a terrible one. They were literally white slaves, and once they had entered the houses with the big numbers on the lanterns outside their doors, the houses with the shutters ever closed, they had left the outer world behind them for always. By means of a system of fines, by the means of sales on credit at most extortionate rates of the miserable luxuries of attire, perfumery and toilette articles, each wretched woman had upon her limbs the unbreakable shackles of a debt that she could never hope to discharge, a debt which constantly grew larger. When she had ceased to please the customers of one house she was sold to some keeper in some other part of France. In the argot of the *tenanciers* she was described as a "*colis*" (a package) and "forwarded by rail" to her new destination. Each move meant a descent in the ladder

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

of that hideous hierarchy. She ended up in some of the lowest and cheapest markets of vice; after which the gutter, the hospital or the river. Things have been a little better since the war, but the system is still a scandalous one. None can contemplate the lives of the pensionnaires of such houses as la Maison Tellier without indignation against the exploiters and pity for their victims, and Maupassant must have forced himself to conceal his anger on the one hand and his compassion on the other.

He was many months in the writing of this tale. He worked at it during part of 1880 and all through 1881. Tourguéneff had been told about the story and had been consulted by Maupassant, who knew no English, as to what were the words of the British national song for the scene on the quay where French and English sailors meet and fight, the French singing *La Marseillaise* and the Britishers "Rule Britannia." Tourguéneff wrote: "What the English sailors sing is 'Rule Britannia, Britannia Rules the Waves,' but one can content oneself with the first two words." Tourguéneff is accordingly responsible for this absurdity, drunken English sailors singing Rule Britannia!



## CHAPTER XIX

Maupassant's Choice of a Publisher—The Publisher's First Letter—Ten Years' Later—Maupassant in 1890—Zola on *La Maison Tellier*—Maupassant's First Voyage—Literary Harvest in Corsica—Gleanings by O. Henry and Mary Johnston (?)—Visit to Father Didon—Maupassant and the Crucifix—What Coppée saw on board the *Bel-Ami*.

**M**AUPASSANT'S own opinion on *La Maison Tellier* was that it was "*raide et très audacieuse*," which may be colloquially translated as "a bit thick and very bold," and he probably thought that no paper nor review would care to publish it as a serial. He accordingly sent it direct to a publisher for publication in book form. He did not propose it to Charpentier. Possibly he thought he could get better terms from a smaller man and besides that he would feel that Charpentier would naturally be inclined to concentrate his energies in pushing books, to the works of Zola and other big men, and that authors of less notoriety would be correspondingly neglected. It was better to be a star writer for some smaller publisher than in the ruck of Charpentier's penmen. Besides he could get better terms from a new man. And money was ever a very great consideration with Guy de Maupassant. He used to say that it was his only consideration, but that was mere cynicism, and we have his own words, in a conversation with his valet François, refuting this statement of his. His own mode of life was modest enough, but

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

his generosity was unlimited; he loved lavish hospitality, and, of course, his many *amours* were a constant drain on his resources. But he never cared for money won at gambling or in speculation. François tells of an occasion in the rue Montchanin, in 1889, when Maupassant came home early in the morning. The valet found him in his bedroom making little piles of gold coins on the mantelpiece. "These are my last night's winnings," he said. "There is quite a round sum, but I don't intend to keep a *sou* of it all. This afternoon I shall take it to the Charity office. I really can't understand my aversion from all games of hazard, when I am such an enthusiast about play of wit and still more so for athletic sports of every kind."

Victor Havard was the publisher—a new man—to whom he proposed *La Maison Tellier*. He sent him this story with *Le Papa à Simon*, *En Famille*, and *l'Histoire d'une Fille de Ferme*. The following is the letter in which Havard agreed to publish them :

PARIS, March 8th, 1881.

"My dear Author,

"I much regretted having been out when you called, but all the same I read with pleasure the short stories you left for me.

"As you caused me to suppose, *La Maison Tellier* is 'thick' and very bold; it is above all a burning ground which I think will arouse much anger and sham indignations; but after all the story is saved by its form and your talent. That is everything, and I shall be much surprised if you don't get a big success. (I am not speaking of literary success, which you have in advance, but a book-selling success.) As to 'Simon's Daddy,' it is just simply a masterpiece.

"As you said that you were very anxious to see the book

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

selling out as quickly as possible, I sent the three stories to the printer's as soon as I had read them, and I beg you to be so good as to give me an appointment, so that we can together decide upon the date of publication within a few days.

"I trust your indisposition has had not bad consequences, and even that you are quite all right again; as a matter of fact, I should not let you be ill just now, for it is really not the time for it.

"I hope to see you soon, dear Sir, and be assured of all my devotion.  
V. HAVARD."

This was the beginning of an association which lasted for the whole of Maupassant's literary career, though in 1887 he changed from Havard to Ollendorff, possibly because *Mont-Oriol* had hung fire badly in spite of Havard's efforts on behalf of a book about which he was almost deliriously enthusiastic. He returned to Havard in 1890 with the *l'Inutile Beauté* collection of stories. With occasional infidelities, Maupassant gave all his work to Havard from 1881 up to 1887.

The year 1881 was accordingly the date on which Havard began to publish for him.

Ten years later Maupassant was again in correspondence with Victor Havard about the *Maison Tellier* volume, through a fighting solicitor, a Maître Jacob, *avoué*, of 4 Faubourg Montmartre. His letter to Jacob on the subject is one of several written at this time which show what havoc disease had worked in his brain. Havard had worked hard and loyally for him for years, was enthusiastic about his books and had—in the beautiful English trade parlance—"met" him in every way in the matters of money and advances. In

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

1891 Havard is attacked on a question of accounts by Jacob, whom Maupassant had set on to him. In giving his instructions to Jacob, Maupassant had written :

" You have another dossier, *La Maison Tellier*, of essential importance and value in this new affair versus Havard. You will find in it the following memorandum by me :

" ' Notified by an English bookseller that all copies of *La Maison Tellier* have been sold out at Havard's and have been so for the last three months. I had the fact officially certified by a huissier. Mr. Jacob, in my name, then served an injunction on the publisher ordering him to have in stock in his shop, and that within twenty-four hours of the service of the writ, an edition of 500 copies.

" ' This they managed to print that same night, but were, however, obliged to ask me to grant them twelve hours' respite.

" ' This fact proves absolutely, that, under my threat to take my book away from him, Havard, without any hesitation at all admitted by his immediate compliance with my order, that he had no right to leave his shop for a single day minus a stock of all my books, since that is a volume of stories which comes under the same agreement as *Des Vers*, and that he admits and signs for that in this agreement.' "

In a normal condition Maupassant would never have acted thus towards a man he had grown to consider as a friend. When he sometimes stated : " My great wish is to ruin a publisher or two," he always followed this remark up with a shout of laughter and the saying, " Wouldn't that be a lark ! ". *La Maison Tellier* was published at the end of 1881. Havard had no doubt pointed out that the " copy " originally supplied would not make a volume of satisfactory size and so Maupassant supplied four more stories, *Sur l'Eau* (in which a wonderful description of the Seine

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

serves as the vehicle for a haunting tale of horror), *Une Partie de Campagne* (another boating story, in which in the calmest way Maupassant describes the seduction of a young girl and the simultaneous adultery of her mother by two oarsmen, as quite natural occurrences, to be related without comment of any sort), *La Femme de Paul*, already described, and *Au Printemps*, which seems to have a great deal to do with the apparent misogyny of O. Henry, whom Maupassant influenced in many ways but perhaps in nothing more than in his views on women and the marriage state. This story has also a real touch of humour. In 1891, Ollendorff brought out an edition of this collection, and in this there appeared a ninth story, which was printed directly after the *Maison Tellier* and was called *Les Tombales*. This word was coined, or rather adapted, by Maupassant to describe women who frequent cemeteries, masquerading as mourners, to elicit sympathy from male mourners by a ghastly comedy of grief. The male tries to console, offers first his arm and then his heart and his purse with it. It may be noted that this *nouvelle* suggested a new lure to the professionals of the *trottoir* and that after *Les Tombales* had appeared serially a great number of widows in mourning were seen about the streets of Paris seeking for consolers.

The name "Tellier" was taken from one of the characters in *Madame Bovary*. It is a common enough name in Normandy and it is curious that no protest was made by any Tellier against the use of the

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

name in such a connection. The French courts would have granted an injunction and possible damages. There was a great Le Tellier, a chancellor, who is remembered by a certain size or format of writing paper, *papier tellière*, which he designed. There was also a Le Tellier, a Jesuit, who was Louis XIV's last confessor and must have heard certain things which would be quite in keeping with the spirit of Maupassant's book: lubricity and religious hysteria. Maupassant also borrowed from Flaubert the name "Delamare," which, written de Lamare, is the name of the husband in *Une Vie*. It was the real name of Charles Bovary, of the country doctor from whom Bovary was painted. Maupassant used to say that he had not Balzac's gifts of inventing names for his characters—Dickens had the same gift—"I have not got Balzac's patience, reading names on signboards. I do very much in this respect what Flaubert used to do. I take names for my people at haphazard out of the Directory. You'll find Homais in the Bottin, as well as Duval, Le Senecal, Hurel and other Bovaryan names."

He was speaking at the time to Tancrède Martel, and he added: "You've got a curious Christian name and a sonorous surname. I must keep them in mind."

Martel points out that there came a Martel into *Mont-Oriol* and into several of the short stories. And later on Maupassant also used the name Tancrède. Martel relates some conversation he had with Mau-

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

passant anent this, and as his account gives a picture of Maupassant in 1890 it is reproduced here :

"Two years after the publication of this fine book (*Pierre et Jean*—1888) I met Maupassant for the last time, at the corner of the Chaussée d'Antin and the boulevard des Italiens. I was with Paul Arène of whom Maupassant was very fond. He came up to us and shook hands. I was struck, on a first glance by his emaciation and the expression of anxiety on his face. He was wearing a top hat, an overcoat, fawn-coloured, and trousers of some nondescript hue. His sunburnt complexion, his clipped moustache and his slow and listless walk gave him the appearance of some colonial, tired by a long sojourn under the sun, or making excessive use of drugs. His look showed his contempt for the people passing by. One felt, one guessed, that this powerful novelist was never on the same level as the crowd.

" 'Let's go into the Café Napolitain for a minute,' he said.

"I could not believe my ears, Maupassant just tolerated the café but absolutely tabooed the seats on the pavement outside. He asked for a quinquina" (wine with quinine in it) "and greeted its arrival with these words: 'Everything is bad everywhere—in Algiers, Nice, Corsica, Naples! There is nothing worth anything except salmon trout and the wine of Saint Laurent-sur-Var. And even that . . .'

" 'Come, come,' said Paul Arène. 'You live jolly well at Antibes: shell-fish, sea-urchins, red mullet, olives and the rest.'

" 'Yes, one lives better there than in Paris.' Then turning to me he said: 'Did you read *Gil Blas* the day before yesterday.'

" 'Of course, I did,' I answered. 'Everything that comes from you interests and delights me.'

"He gave a boyish laugh.

" 'I collared your Christian name,' he said, 'and used it to make a real family name, a name competing with the Registrar-General and owing nothing to anybody but me.'

"Dear, modest and glorious departed one. That was the first time I ever heard Maupassant boasting of anything."

Martel goes to relate that the tale in question was

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

*L'Epreuve*, which was afterwards published in *L'Inutile Beauté* collection, and that one of the characters here—he plays the part of a particularly treacherous friend and adulterer—was called Tancrét. He adds that he told Maupassant that he could not claim to have invented the name Tancrét, as such a person existed in Paris in the seventeenth century and that Racine mentions him in a letter to Boileau.

“Maupassant, without saying anything, looked at me fixedly. And I still blame myself, though years and years have since passed away, for having—well, not hurt his feelings, but disillusioned him by depriving him of the somewhat childish pleasure of having ‘created a name.’”

It was possibly his difficulty in inventing names that caused Maupassant to borrow them from celebrities and even from his personal friends. There was Moiron and there was Marie Bashkirtseff, thinly disguised. In one of his stories he uses the name Dentu, that of a famous publisher in Paris, and in another the name Le Poittevin, which was his mother's maiden name.

*La Maison Tellier* was a great success. Twelve editions were sold in two years, and it has been selling ever since. The book was dedicated to Tourguéneff, who saw to it that it was translated into Russian, where the press received it with shouts of acclaim. The critics were too flabbergasted to try and influence the public one way or another. Wolff was decided not again to make a fool of himself. Indeed later he be-



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

came one of Maupassant's most zealous censor-bearers. Zola pronounced himself as follows :

“ I won't lay stress on the subject of the first short story which gives its name to the book. The story is about the proprietress of a certain establishment who takes her five women with her to be present at the first communion of one of her nieces in a village of a neighbouring departement; and the whole study is from then on directed to the outing of these females, showing how their youth sprouts once more in the midst the tall grass, as also to the religious emotion which seizes upon them in the little church, to such an extent that their sobs bring sobs from the rest of the congregation. Nothing could be of a more delicate analysis, and the tale will survive as a very curious psychological and physiological document, with the return home of the women, happy, rejuvenated, balmy with fresh air.

“ People will ask : ‘ Why choose such subjects? Why not take decent surroundings? ’ No doubt. But I think that Maupassant chose this subject, because he felt in it a very human note, stirring up the deepest depth of the human being. These wretched girls, kneeling in this church and sobbing, tempted him as a splendid illustration of youthful bringing-up reappearing under acquired habits however abominable these might be; and besides that there are there the nervosities of women, their need of what is marvellous, the faith which persists even in the daily abjection of their lives. The writer had no idea of ridiculing religion; rather did he wish to affirm its power. It is all a philosophical and social experiment carried out with both courage and reserve.

“ Amongst the other tales which make up the volume, those which I prefer are, *Histoire d'Une Fille de Ferme* and *En Famille*. I cannot analyse them at any length. In the first, a female servant, after having had a child by a ploughboy, marries her master from whom she conceals her child. Later on he is delighted to adopt it. In the second a family of bourgeois throws itself ravenously on the inheritance of the old mother, who has simply fallen into a lethargy and whose awakening is a very thunderbolt. What I like in these works is their beautiful simplicity. The *Histoire d'Une Fille de Ferme* especially has a beginning which is superb in simple breadth.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

I advise our novelists who see our peasants athwart Homer, Shakespeare or Hugo, to read these few pages where they would find the right note about our country-side.

"To resume. In his new book Maupassant remains the penetrating analyst, the solid writer of *Boule-de-Suif*. His is without any doubt whatever the best balanced and sanest temperament of the young generation. He must now write a novel, a good-winded long book, to show us really what he is made of."

*En Famille* had appeared in Madame Adam's *Nouvelle Revue*, which was afterwards to launch Loti and Bourget, on February 15th, 1881. It was universally admired, though not perhaps at the Ministry of Marine. Tourguéneff wrote: "I have read your story in *La Nouvelle Revue* with the very greatest pleasure, and our friends in the rue Douai (Zola, etc.), who are very hard to please, are entirely of my opinion."

*Une Fille de Ferme* had appeared in March in the *Revue Bleue* and once more everybody was talking of the new literary genius.

Some years later a member of the English House of Lords who had made Maupassant's acquaintance in Paris and grown friends with him was invited down to Etretat and put up in Madame de Maupassant's villa, as Maupassant's new house, *La Guillette*, was supposed not to be comfortable enough for so grand a *seigneur* as an English lord. He spent ten days with Maupassant and was addressed by everybody as "Monsieur le Baron." He seems to have come to dinner at *La Guillette* in a frock-coat with his tie passed through a gold ring with a diamond in it!

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

He was so much respected that during the whole ten days Maupassant did not play one single practical joke upon him. "After he had gone," writes François, "I said to myself: 'He's a lucky cove to be a baron, and it's no doubt because of his title that he has been spared. How could he stay ten days here without having a single *farce* played at his expense?' Never had such a thing happened before in the annals of *La Guillette*."

One day the baron went out driving with Maupassant, and François notes that there were no women with them. Strange, he thought it. "Two days later while I was giving my master his shower-bath, he said to me: 'I went with the baron to visit the Bénédictine monastery at Fécamp, and he asked to have a look at the Maison Tellier, which really is in Rouen but which for certain reasons I transferred to Fécamp. The baron saw the house at Fécamp and told me he recognized it perfectly from my description of it in the book. It's very, very funny.'"

It is worthy of note that the stories written and published in 1880 and 1881 were based on early impressions noted at the time, pondered over and laid by in order in the memory. The stories are of peasant life, of boating adventures, of observations made in the streets of Paris and among the hacks at the Ministry of Marine. Yet that period was one of great excitement and a flood of new and wonderful impressions. "Enfranchised at last," to use his own expression, almost the first use of his liberty had been

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

to travel. At last he had the means and the leisure to realize the *Wanderlust* that for so long had tantalized him. In September, 1880, he left Paris for Corsica. His mother had been there, at Bastelica, shortly before, with heart-trouble. She was ever an enthusiast about the "perfumed island." Guy put up at the Hôtel de France, Ajaccio, described in *Une Vie* as the scene of a marital outrage on poor Jeanne. A local poet, Léon Gustacci, made friends with him and has described his wonderful prowess as a swimmer in "The Big Blue." He also gives a poignant account of how on the day of Guy's sailing, he found him in his room in the hôtel in agonies from the headache that later so often tortured him. The Great Distress had begun.

Maupassant published four articles in the *Gaulois*, to which he was now regularly attached, on his Corsican impressions, but the material which he had there collected for stories was not used at the time. It was stored away in his memory, to be studied from every angle, pondered over and not to be used for many months. This was his invariable practice and one of the reasons of his mastery. The Corsican material, apart from what was used in newspaper articles, was not made available for fiction until *Une Vie* was on the stocks, three years later. The story *Le Bonheur*, which is the best of his Corsican stories and perhaps one of the most striking of all his tales, was not published in book-form (in *Les Contes du Jour et de la Nuit*) until 1885. This is the story of the

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

lady of high birth who follows to a humble cottage hidden away in a narrow cleft between two mountains the man she loved. He was a non-commissioned officer in her father's hussar regiment, "a handsome lad, the son of peasants, but wearing the blue tunic with an air." She, a girl of noble family and wealth, had eloped with this man. They had lived in this retreat all their lives and she had been happy, "Very happy," she said. "He made me very happy. I have never regretted anything." He was then eighty-two and quite deaf. "She still loved him. She had become a peasant woman with a cap and a (cotton) skirt. She used to eat from an earthenware platter on a (deal) table, seated on a straw-bottomed chair, boiled cabbage and potatoes with bacon. She used to sleep on a straw mattress by his side. She had never thought of anything but of him. . . . She had regretted nothing. . . . She had never wanted anything but him. . . . He had filled her existence from one end to the other with happiness. She could not have been happier."

There can be no doubt that this story inspired that brilliant American authoress, Mary Johnston, with one of the episodes in that beautiful book, "The Old Dominion," where the fugitive lovers find in the wildest remoteness just such a pair of impossible, life-long sweethearts. It may be noted about Guy's story also that there is some careless writing in it. Maupassant in the French of the passage quoted above speaks of the woman's dress as "en jupe de toile" (which literally means a cloth skirt) and of her dining

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

off "une table en bois." To be concise, he does not specify the nature of the cloth, nor the kind of wood. A cloth dress and a wooden table might be the accoutrement and furniture of a queen dining in state in her palace.

There are fine descriptions of the island scenery in *Le Bonheur*, and this is how Maupassant refers to his journey in 1880:

"Five years ago I had a journey in Corsica. This wild island is further away from us and less well known to us than America, in spite of the fact that one sometimes sees it from the French coast, as we do to-day."

This shows that this story was written at the Villa Mutterse in Antibes. Another Corsican story of no importance whatever is called *Une Page d'Histoire Inédite* and professes to be an authentic account of how Bonaparte as a youth escaped assassination at the hands of the Paolists. It has no foundation in fact, although Maupassant declares it "*de point en point authentique*." Then there are *Une Vendetta* (*Contes du Jour et de la Nuit*) and *Un Bandit Corse* (*Le Père Milon*). The Napoleon story was one of four articles of special correspondence sent to *Le Gaulois*, in which Maupassant showed himself a journalist *di primo cartello*.

The best use, however, which he made of his observations during this journey, was in the Corsican scenes in *Une Vie*, where poor Jeanne at last is awarded what Lord Byron calls "the paltry prize" of love.

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

During his visit to Corsica Maupassant went to see Père Didon, the famous preacher and author of a beautiful, vivid "Life of Christ," who was living at the time at the monastery at Corbara. In one letter to the *Gaulois* he announces his intention of visiting the monastery and the monk in the following characteristic manner :

"The lofty mountains show their peaks of pink granite, or grey, above the foot-hills; the scent of the maquis (bush) comes down every evening borne on the winds from the mountains; down there mountain passes and torrents and peaks, much more beautiful to look at than the bald heads of politicians; and my thoughts suddenly turn to an amiable preacher, P. Didon, whom I met last year in poor Flaubert's house. Supposing I go and call on Father Didon? . . ."

In a subsequent letter he describes his visit to Corbara and his interview with the great teacher. The hope has been expressed that this letter might be reprinted. The meeting of the two men must have been full of interest, the pantheist, contemner of the Church, bursting with vitality, and the ascetic monk, an apostle of the later day. It is quite possible that things that Didon said to Maupassant, or the influence of the spectacle of this man's renouncement of all that the world has to offer, all that Maupassant so lusted after then, may have sown in his heart that seed of faith that towards the end seemed to be in germination. It is known that in the last lucid days he had the *Imitation of Christ* by his bedside. There are other signs also.

François describes how once out walking with his



PRESENT ASPECT OF FATHER DIDON'S CELL.



THE DOMINICAN MONASTERY AT CORBARA, IN CORSICA, WHERE MAUPASSANT VISITED FATHER DIDON.





## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

master they came upon a gigantic crucifix outside a cemetery. It was at Divonne, in 1891, a few months before the end. He pointed to the Christ and said to his valet: "There is the most intelligent, the best organized brain that ever came on earth. When one thinks of all he did! And he was only thirty-three years of age when they crucified him. Napoleon I, whom I admire—for his genius only—used to say: 'In everything that was done by this man—God or not—there is something mysterious, something indiscernible, something. . . .'"

The passing of some cattle interrupted Maupassant, relates his valet. At that time Maupassant was no longer the militant atheist, as which he once described himself to Hugues Leroux. After his internment, the gentle and truly religious poet, François Coppée, visited, in the harbour at Antibes, Maupassant's yacht, the *Bel-Ami*, which was lying there for sale.

"In the cabin, I see lying about, broken and covered with dust, the last pens which the writer had used. I find there also—not without surprise—a book of prayers."

In his despair, in the full knowledge of the dreadful fate that was to be his, he went, before his mind failed, as he knew it would fail, where most men go—to the foot of Calvary.

The rest of Coppée's note gives further testimony as to how Maupassant was loved by those who knew him :

"On this pretty pleasure boat, he who will remain one of the masters of French prose satisfied his taste, his need for

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

solitude. For already at an early period in his life, he suffered from social life, from contact with men. But the rough voice of the sailor who is showing me over the abandoned boat, trembles with emotion at the name of the absent one. The author of so many pessimistic pages knew how to make himself loved, was generous and good.

"What a fate was that of Guy de Maupassant! Struck down by an evil worse than death, in full vigour, at the height of his success. Struck down on the morrow of the day on which he had been able to content his caprice as a gentleman of letters, and give himself this refuge afloat for work and for daydreams.

"It is here that the perfect story-teller lived his sweetest, his gentlest hours. And, to-morrow, perhaps, the new owner of the *Bel Ami*—some man about town—will change her name with the dash of a paint-brush and will stow champagne in her hold.

"How sad it all is."

These lines were written before Maupassant's death. *Bel-Ami* was sold a few months later, after its skipper had been laid to rest. She became the property of two gentlemen in succession and in 1900 had become a fishing smack. Her original name had been *La Zingara*.

## CHAPTER XX

Napoleon and Maupassant—Fate's Irony Towards Both—Meagreness of The Allotted Span—Table of Maupassant's Works—Reasons of His Success—A Revival of Mediæval Story-Telling—The Universality of his Vogue—His Pessimism—The Sincerity of It.

**A** CURIOUS parallel may be drawn between the careers of Guy de Maupassant and Napoleon, whom he so admired—for his genius only. They were both men of extraordinary brain power and physical robustness, and both by excess of nervous expenditure and by abuse of life brought their brains to disaster. Both had a supreme contempt for humanity. Napoleon showed his by all kinds of outrageous manners towards those who approached him, Maupassant, in the way he wrote about men and women. While Napoleon, however, reserved his most scathing sarcasms for the medical profession and tolerated the priests, Maupassant hurried from one doctor to another, full of faith and full of hope, while never missing an opportunity to pillory the ministers of the Catholic Church. Both entered meteor-like on a career of brilliant success; the progress of both was checked by one fatal woman, who came as Nemesis for scores of her sisters who had been their victims, and to each Fate allotted a meagre span of triumphant life. Maupassant flourished twelve years—from 1880 to 1891; to Napoleon twelve years were also doled out charily, for if his

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

true career began after Brumaire, it ended when he crossed the Niemen at the head of the Grande Armée—that is to say, from the end of 1799 to the middle of 1812. Both fully aware when the end had come and nothing lay before them but disaster, defeat and grief, sought surcease in the Roman way, and both were condemned to live by the imbecile officiousness of friends. And for both afterwards there was nothing but what they had foreseen, grief, defeat, and disaster. It is a question, indeed, which is the more pitiful—the slow decay, the long drawn-out agony of St. Helena, or the speedier and more violent disintegration of Passy. Both had been morbidly careful of their health, and to each Fate allotted one of the two cruellest deaths that her poison-quiver holds.

Maupassant's life, then, covers the brief span of twelve years. The years of drudgery at the Ministry in which his early manhood were spent, where he was a marionette and not a man, cannot count as part of the Maupassant career. They were years of preparation and training and in view of their overwhelmingly successful outcome cannot be looked on as wasted. Yet when a man is to end at forty-one, it is hard that he should not begin to live till he is thirty.

He himself laid it down that his biography was in the schedule of his literary production. Nothing else, he held, was of any concern to the public. His motto was: *Cache ta Vie*. This morbid secretiveness so grew upon him that he never would allow his portrait to be published, although at first, at the beginning of

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

his fame, he was not averse from this publicity. "I have imposed upon myself," he once wrote, "an absolute law never to allow my portrait to be published, whenever I am able to prevent this being done. Any exceptions have only resulted from my being taken by surprise. Our works belong to the public, but not our faces." This objection was still more vigorously formulated and enforced—as will be seen—on a subsequent occasion. With one exception Maupassant refused any requests for materials to write of his mode of life, and his methods of work. The interviewers in those days of acute Blaythwaitism—encouraged by every writer in France almost—were invariably turned away from Maupassant's door, but not discourteously, as the following letter will show. In 1888 M. Emile Deshays, the editor of a journal called *L'Echo de Lorraine*, anxious, no doubt, to claim Maupassant as one of the glorious sons of that province, wrote to him for some particulars of his life, and this is the kindly but firm reply that he received :

" Etretat, August 24th, 1888.

" Sir and dear Confrère,

" I should have been most sincerely delighted to send you the biographical notes which you ask for, but I have made it a law to myself, never to furnish any information of this nature. Very often already have I refused to answer questions similar to the one you send me, because I do not wish the public to enter into my life. Everything that has been published about me is false, a thing I'm very glad of, and I take care, in consequence, never to correct these misstatements.

" I do hope, Sir and dear Confrère, that you will understand and appreciate the feeling which makes me act in this way and

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

my very legitimate desire not to be shown, while I am alive, in my home and in my habits.

"Believe, my dear Confrère, in my very cordially devoted feelings,

"GUY DE MAUPASSANT."

This letter was first made public in 1911, after François had published his *Souvenirs de Guy de Maupassant*. Monsieur Deshayes, in sending it to the "*Intermédiaire des Chercheurs*," writes: "At a time when the indiscretions of a valet de chambre are baring Maupassant's private life to the world, the following letter, received more than twenty years ago and never before made public, may be found of some interest."

"Poor Maupassant," comments the *Intermédiaire*, "who was so frightened of being seen in his private life and who goes and takes a valet, who has a memory and a knack of authorship."

The following list of Maupassant's works with their dates would then have been, had he been spared, all that any biographer would have felt justified in publishing about the twelve years of his literary activity. It may also serve as a guide-rope as he is followed through this period, as the map, on the urgency of which Robert Louis Stevenson so insisted.

### LIST AND DATES OF MAUPASSANT'S WORKS.

1879 (Feb. 19th): First performance of *Histoire du Vieux Temps* at the Théâtre Ballande. Published in form of a *plquette* by Tresse, same year.

1880: *Boule-de-Suif* (in *Les Soirées de Médan*) and *Des Vers*.

1881: *La Maison Tellier*.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

- 1882 : *Mademoiselle Fifi*, published first by Kistemaeckers; in the following year it was published by Havard.
- 1883 : *Les Contes de la Bécasse, Une Vie, Emile Zola*.
- 1884 : *Clair de Lune, Les Soeurs Rondoli, Miss Harriet, Au Soleil*.
- 1885 : *Yvette, Contes du Jour et de la Nuit, Bel-Ami, Contes et Nouvelles*.
- 1886 : *La Petite Roque, Monsieur Parent*.
- 1887 : *Toine, Le Horla, Mont-Oriol*.
- 1888 : *Le Rosier de Madame Husson, Sur l'Eau, Pierre et Jean*.
- 1889 : *La Main Gauche, Fort Comme La Mort*.
- 1890 : *L'Inutile Beauté, La Vie Errante, Notre Cœur*.
- 1891 : First performance of *Musotte* at the Gymnase. *Musotte* was written in collaboration with Jacques Normand and is a comedy in three acts, in prose.
- 1893 (March 6th) : Four months after Maupassant's death, *La Paix du Ménage*, a two-act comedy in prose, was played for the first time.

He left behind him, unfinished portions of a novel called *L'Angelus*, and of another called *L'Ame étrangère*.

All his work appeared serially in such papers as *Le Figaro, Le Gaulois, Gil Blas, Echo de Paris, Revue des Deux Mondes, La Nouvelle Revue, Le Revue de Paris, La Revue Bleue*. The *Revue Bleue* was specially favoured in this respect, having the privilege of publishing for the first time that masterpiece: *L'Histoire d'une Fille de Ferme*, the *Au Soleil* travel descriptions, and Maupassant's studies of Zola and Flaubert.

He left many manuscripts behind him, for the most part rough drafts of stories and travel-pieces which he afterwards re-wrote. Since his death much of this



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

unpolished work has been made up into volumes and published as Maupassant's posthumous works. Three such volumes are *Misti*, *Le Père Milon*, and *Les Dimanches d'un Bourgeois de Paris*. The only object in printing these books has been to make money out of Maupassant's fame and the notoriety of his tragic fate. No thought has been given to his reputation. These books contain for the most part drafts that were afterwards elaborated into masterpieces. Unfortunately many people were initiated into Maupassant by these books. A big bookseller and publisher was heard to say recently : " My first reading of Maupassant was in the *Dimanches d'un Bourgeois de Paris*, which contains the embryos of several of his finest tales. ' Is that de Maupassant ? ' was my disillusioned cry when I had waded through it." And there were thousands in the same case. Possibly one of the reasons of the falling off of Maupassant readers and Maupassant sales within recent years in France is that these ill-considered republications of discarded matter have injured the writer's reputation.

The history of these twelve years is one of unvarying success. Each new Maupassant story or novel was eagerly read all over the world. The publication of each of his books was a real, social event in the Paris year. " You are the only contemporary writer," wrote Alexandre Dumas fils to him, " whose next work I look for with eager anxiety." His publisher grows more and more enthusiastic over the literary quality of his works, although sometimes his judg-

On allait la clore  
 dans une course, et  
 s'enfuir, et ce serait  
 fini. On ne la verrait  
 plus. Était-ce possible ?  
 Elle n'aurait plus sa  
 mère ? Cette chose fi-  
 -gure si familière,  
 une des qu'on a ouvert  
 les yeux, aimée des qu'on  
 a ouvert les bras, ce  
 grand dévot, l'af-  
 -fection, cet être unique,  
 la mère, plus importante  
 pour le cœur que tout  
 le reste des choses, était  
 disparue !

Chap. IX Une vie

*Supplément au roman*



FACSIMILE OF MANUSCRIPT OF "UNE VIE."

CARICATURE OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT.



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

ment proved at fault as to the commercial value of the books, and the sales never reached the high totals of some other writers. His popularity was not confined to one class; it was general. The reviewers hardest to please were his censor-bearers. Havard writes to Maupassant on December 10th, 1888, on the publication of *Mont-Oriol*, and says: "I spoke yesterday of your book to Wolff with such enthusiasm that he insisted on my sending it to him at once so that he may write an article about you, and i'faith, I took it upon myself to send him a copy without asking your advice." Wolff wrote an enthusiastic review and may have regretted doing this, for at first *Mont-Oriol* hung fire rather badly, and Havard reports: "We are selling a bare hundred a day." The severe Brunetière of the *Revue des Deux Mondes* was a Maupassant enthusiast and compared him most favourably with Paul Bourget, whom Maupassant unwisely considered his superior and indeed tried to imitate, without, however, succeeding in spoiling his own style. Jules Lemaître, François Coppée, Alphonse Daudet, Emile Zola, and the great Russian writers all hailed Guy de Maupassant as a master. The public worshipped him. Even women, whom he so persistently disparaged and misrepresented, delighted in his books.

If one wonders at this general concordance of appreciation, one has only to remember that everybody likes to *listen* to an interesting story, and the charm of Maupassant's stories is that as you read them, so artistically is the art of their composition concealed,

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

you seem to be listening to a fascinating tale *told* in beautiful but simple language, by a cultured man who never once obtrudes his personality upon you, or seems to invite you to admire his literary skill, or his artistic writing, or moral appreciations on the facts he is relating, or indeed anything except the smooth and relentless flow of the narration from its inception to its fatal end. Maupassant writing is Maupassant talking after months of preparation. François relates how one evening in 1892, after he had left his master in the lunatic asylum: "I returned home and picked up haphazard one of my master's books. I found myself interrupting my reading, it seemed to me that he was standing by me. His books are so much himself, that I seem to hear him speak; it seems to me that he is going to call me by my name. I see the gestures with which he emphasizes his narration. I find him, every bit of him, with the hearty laugh with which he used to talk about his readers. Alas, yes. Bygone days come up before me and distinctly I hear my master giving me a familiar order: 'François, this afternoon you will take my story to the *Gil Blas*. I hope they will be pleased, as they want them pretty thick.' And then his laugh would ring out, loud and full, like that of a child who is pleased that its task is finished."

Thus a serving-man. Thus, per contra, a writer (Pol Neveux) in a study of Maupassant, published as a preface to the fine edition of his works brought out by Louis Conard:

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

"In Maupassant survived the soul of those roving clerks, who, revealers of the germinating spirit of the Third Estate, used to sing at fairs and where folks sat up at nights, their irreverent *fabliaux* " (the metrical tales of the troubadours).

"The authors of the *fabliaux* are of the people, they make mock, with jesting irony, and wink, as a nobleman or a priest goes by. They efface themselves behind their subject and have not even a conception of the revelation of himself by the storyteller." In other words they were purely objective.

Maupassant himself would have delighted in this description of himself as the successor to the wandering story-tellers of mediaeval France. It is how he himself described his literary status once. He wrote out for M. Jacob a memorandum about himself which began with the following paragraph :

"M. Guy de Maupassant is the first French writer to bring about a renaissance of the national taste of the country for the tale and the short story."

It was unusual for him ever to speak about his art, and this time he had only written in the heat of provocation. He has been heard to say : "As for me, I am unable really to love my art. I am too critical with it, I analyse it too much. I feel how relatively puny is the value of one's ideas, of words, of the most powerful intellect. I can't prevent myself despising thought, so feeble is it, and form, so unfinished as it is. I really have in an acute and incurable manner a realization of human impotence and of the effort which ends in such a wretched make-shift."

There was no objection on the part of his readers to his frequent descriptions of animal love. The

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

French do not reprove this sort of writing when the author's object is evidently not to glorify vice or to excite evil passions and where the language is guarded and unobjectionable. Indeed these stories which turn on a natural function are and always have been popular in France. They are considered pornographical only when the language is coarse and the intention obviously beastly. To suggest to a Frenchman, or even to a Frenchwoman, that Maupassant wrote improper stories would excite derision and possible references to British hypocrisy and cant. On the other hand much English fiction, in which accounts of flagellation and domination excite on the one hand the Sadism and on the other the Masochism of a race whose trend in those directions is the outcome of centuries of alcoholism, is considered in France pornographical in the extreme. Maupassant's stories gratify the malice innate in every human being. The man rejoices in the exposure of the man as mean as himself, the female inclined to wantonness is delighted to see a sister found out and pilloried. In the mirror that Maupassant holds up before the reader's eyes, this latter sees not the outside world but himself or herself without recognizing the reflection because his or her conceit of his or her character is naturally a favourable one. But the reader feels he knows just such a person. He can't remember where, but he knows him. *Farbleu*, it is himself. The absence of all moralizing is another factor of success. Readers like to do their own moralizing. It flatters a sense of their

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

own importance and acumen when they come to the conclusion, without being urged thereunto by the author, that certain actions, certain lines of conduct are reprehensible. They feel themselves sitting in judgment; they are grand jurymen (and women). In some, no doubt, the satisfaction is the same as prompted John Bradford to his remembered words of thankfulness: "There but for the grace of God. . . ."

Brunetière used to say that what made Maupassant's books so superior to those of Paul Bourget, was that whereas Paul Bourget's personality forced itself upon the reader on every page he wrote, Maupassant never diverged from a strict objectivity. This is not the case; but at any rate Maupassant hid himself so skilfully that the impression of total aloofness was maintained. One represents him to oneself as bending over men and women, magnifying-glass in hand, like Henri Fabre over his insects, but while the latter comments delightfully on the naughtiness of the things he saw and describes, Maupassant records it only and leaves to the reader the privilege of forming an opinion on motives and acts like these. Amongst Maupassant's female characters are many who destroy their husbands—and wilfully—by their embraces. Henri Fabre describes insects which do the same, as for instance the female of the praying mantis who in the very noon and heyday of the orgasm starts devouring her mate alive. Fabre moralizes a little and one likes him for it. Maupassant does not moralize at all, laughs, possibly jeeringly, and says



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

“Vos Plaudite” and we like him even better. Some may trace a close resemblance, by the way, between the female mantis and the much-marrying and carnal woman. The former, for instance, treats her husband as “consumable stores,” the latter looks to the husband’s demise for these as legatee.

Maupassant’s pessimism—not the despairing outcry of *Sur l’Eau*—is another decided factor in his success. Man is essentially ungrateful and discontented, forever in complaint against the astounding beneficence of creation. There are few men or women who are not convinced that life is unjust to them, that they have not the share of enjoyment to which they are entitled, and it pleases them to find a celebrated author who holds just this view, on the injustice and cruelty of mundane existence. Even to those reasonably satisfied with circumstances, such pessimism gives a pleasant bitterness to the suavity of a eupeptic existence, like the drops of Angostura in a glass of fruity Xeres wine. And to those altogether satisfied with life and their condition it is pleasant to contemplate those not so favoured. It ought not to be, but it is. Brunetière speaks of Maupassant’s pessimism as haughty and hard, as compared with the sentimental and sympathizing hypochondriasis of Paul Bourget and the poetical and voluptuous doldrums of Pierre Loti. When an intelligent man knows that he carries in his blood a poison that may play havoc with his body and his brain at any moment, a poison for which at that time the doctors had no remedy except

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

drugs hardly less dangerous and noisome, a poison threatening cancer, blindness, total surdity, hideous disfigurements, paralysis, madness, or combinations of these horrors, a disease about which still the faculty says that it is the "*bouteille à encre*" (the bottle of ink, whose contents are swathed in blackness), it is natural enough that a certain despondency should at times beset him. For the rest, when this haunting left him in peace, his natural tendency to great joy in life would react in pessimism. As a matter of fact it is the people who have everything and more than everything they want who are at times most depressed about existence and who have so great a terror of death. Life seems so enjoyable to them that the certainty that a natural period will be put to their enjoyments seems to them a crying injustice, a cruel dispensation. There was never a man who more abundantly quaffed the cup of pleasure than Louis, fifteenth of that name, and never was a man so scared of death. Schopenhauer, who was one of the few authors whom Maupassant had read and who had contaminated him with his pseudo-despair, enjoyed life to the full, lived one year longer than did Epicurus, and, blessed with wealth, splendid digestive organs and the palate of a Brillat-Savarin, had no earthly justification for his Cassandra attitude.

French commonsense describes these people, who are dissatisfied just because they have been so abundantly endowed, as those *qui trouvent la mariée trop belle* (dissatisfied because the bride is too beauti-

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

ful). To some extent Maupassant's pessimism was a pose. A pessimist has a real grievance. He feels very strongly about this or that. Now Maupassant's intimates declare after his death that he never felt strongly about anything, except in the most transitory manner. Henri Céard, dining with Goncourt less than a fortnight after Maupassant's funeral, told Goncourt that he was the most "casual" man he had ever known, the most indifferent to everything, and that just when he seemed to be most passionately interested in something, he had already allowed it to drop.

This during the brief respite of a few years which his Hidden Evil allowed him. When there was, alas! no possibility for him to ignore the hold it had got upon him, when maddening headaches were of constant recurrence and his eyes were continually threatening to fail him, real, black despair took possession of him, his unending but futile fights against which are the saddest things in the history of his wasted life. In the heyday of his success, Jules Lemaître had described his pessimism as unwarranted and ridiculous. After his death, when he had no doubt learned what it was that had so tortured Guy de Maupassant, he recalled his pronouncement.

This same Jules Lemaître, by the way, writing of Maupassant four months before his death, related that a certain celebrated professor had compared Maupassant to a Zola who was temperate and merry, to a Flaubert who was easy and relaxed, to a Paul de

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

Kock who was an artist and misanthropical. Lemaître himself on this occasion paid a splendid tribute to the man he had formerly underrated: "But what," he asks, "do you want a man to say about this robust and faultless story-teller, who spins yarns as easily as I breathe, who brings forth masterpieces like the apple-trees of his homeland bring forth apples, whose philosophy itself is round and clean-cut like an apple? What do you want a man to say of him, unless that he is perfect—and as strong as a Turk?"

## CHAPTER XXI

Voyage to Africa—Maupassant's Love of Travelling—A Tramp in Brittany—The Story *Un Fils*—A Bitter Satire—Maupassant and the Academy—Maupassant and Paternity—Paris in the Eighties—Two Portraits of Maupassant—The Great Anxiety.

**I**N July, 1881, Maupassant visited Africa for the first time. He travelled in the province of Algeria for over three months, returning to Paris with a mass of observations which were to serve him, after the usual period of rumination, for several short stories, such as: *Allouma*, *Un Soir* and *Marroca*, and for his book of travel: *Au Soleil*. The last was not published until three years later, which perhaps explains the wretched bitterness of the opening pages. His mood cannot have been such when he joyously departed towards the sun lands. Can one readily conceive a man who has suddenly come into fame and fortune, who, released from drudgery, is his own master and is setting out on a delightful voyage of exploration with ample means, starting off on his travels with the howl of despair which greets the reader on the first page of *Au Soleil*?

"Life, so short, so long, becomes unbearable at times. It flows along, always the same, with death at the end of it. . . . Do what we will, we shall die. Believe what we may, think what we may, try what we may, we shall die. And one keeps thinking that one may die on the morrow without knowing anything, though thoroughly disgusted with what one knows.

"One gets up and walks about the room and leans against the window. People opposite are lunching, as they were

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

lunching yesterday, as they will be lunching to-morrow, Papa, Mamma, four children. Three years ago, Grandma was still there. She's no longer there. Papa has changed a good deal since we have been neighbours. He does not notice it; he seems contented; he seems happy. Idiot.

"They talk of a marriage, and then of a death and then of their chicken which is tender and then of their maidservant who isn't honest. They worry about a thousand futile and foolish things. The Idiots!"

No, this was certainly not Maupassant's mood when he embarked on the *Abd-el-Kader*, but doubtless he had felt even then about journeys what he expresses lower down in this preface: "A journey is a kind of door through which one passes out from real life as one knows it and enters into an unexplored real life which seems to be a dream."

His account of his travels, which include explorations of Algiers, of Oran, of la Mitidja and the Chélif valley, the crossing of the Atlas mountains, visits to Saida, Tafraoua and Kralfellah, a ride across the desert with two French lieutenants which lasted twenty days and seems to have been what he most enjoyed during the whole journey, a hasty inspection of Constantine and of Bône and the return to France gorged with sunlight and colour, first appeared serially in 1883 in *La Revue Bleue*. *Au Soleil* contains many wonderful descriptions of lights on sea and land, but, true to his rôle of Ménestrel, he devotes many pages to *la chose d'amour*. One of the most striking chapters describes a visit to the village of Boukhrari, which is the headquarters of the women of the Ouled-Nail tribe, who fill in Africa the pitiful rôle of the

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

Boule-de-Suifs and the Mesdemoiselles Fifi of France. He also touches on horrible sexual aberrations common amongst the Arabs—*plaies autrement épouvantables*, as Zola would have described them—and though he never used this material in any of his books,\* it seems to have etched itself on his mind, for when he was insane, as one of his guardians reported, he was heard to rave about things *non inter Christianos nominanda*. Poor, clean-minded Guy!

While France was ringing with *La Maison Tellier*, and the daring experiment had proved so entire a success both commercially and socially, Maupassant put a knapsack on his back and went off—this was in 1882—on a walking tour in Brittany. An account of this appears in the volume *Au Soleil*. It was a regular gipsy wandering, without any plan or purpose, going where fancy took him, with never a reference to the guide-books which he so detested. "There is one thing, one only thing," he writes, "which spoils these charming excursions for me, and that is reading a guide-book. Written by commercial travellers, travelling in miles, with odious and always false descriptions. . . . They are the consolation of drapers travelling by excursion train, and the despair of the real stagers who go, knapsack on the back, a stick in the hand, down the lanes, along the ravines and the seashore. They lie, they don't know anything. They understand nothing, they spoil the beauty of the most enchanting spots, by their emphatic and stupid prose."

\* Except for a mere suggestion in *Le Champ des Oliviers*.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

He describes his mode of travelling thus :

"To sleep in a barn when you don't find an inn, to eat dry bread and drink cold water when there are no victuals to be got, to fear neither rain, nor distances, nor long hours of steady tramping, that's what's needed to explore a country and to penetrate into its very heart, to discover close to the cities where the tourists go, a thousand things, the very existence of which one ignored."

He started from Vannes and walked to Douarnenez after visiting Sucinio, where Count de Richemont, who helped to clear the English out of France, was born, Locmariaquer, the Druidical, and Carnac, the Breton Stonehenge, and then along the coast by way of Pont l'Abbé, Penmarch, and la Pointe du Raz. From Douarnenez he proceeded to Quimper, then on to Brest, where he took the train back to Paris. The account of his tramp fills only thirty-five pages of the book, *Au Soleil*, but is as useful in its way as was Fromentin's *Un Eté dans le Sahara* to Maupassant when he crossed the desert. He brought back in his head materials for stories, of which the most notable was written—contrary to his usual custom—almost immediately after his return to Paris. This is the tale entitled *Un Fils*, which appears in *Contes de la Bécasse* (1883). It is notable, because supremely representative of his methods and art.

This story, flowing, picturesque, with a hundred little touches of photographic verisimilitude, is one of the fiercest satires even Guy de Maupassant ever penned, and it is written with such an art that it is only on reflection that the reader, who has been



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

amused and interested, if mildly shocked, grasps the fact that he has been perusing a terrible indictment against the criminality, the selfishness and the cruelty of the dominant classes. People who knew of Maupassant's contempt for the Academy might detect in his choice of an Academician to make the shameful confession that here a pillory was being erected and a branding-iron being prepared, but the large mass of his readers—and here was his keen and secret joy—would take it as a readable story with the moral that maidservants in inns ought to be careful how they behave.

With regard to Maupassant's professed contempt for the Academy, to be a member of which was, according to an early saying of his, one of the three things that dishonour a writer (the other two being writing for the *Revue des Deux Mondes* and accepting a decoration), it is more than probable that if he had lived he would have yielded to the solicitations of certain Academicians, have entered his candidacy and have taken his seat under the cupola. In fact Ludovic Halévy, Academician, relates that, having urged Maupassant to join their illustrious Compagnie, he replied: "No, it's not for me. Later on, perhaps. But at present, I want to be free."

The Academy's main function being the safeguarding of the purity of the French language, no writer since its foundation had his place more clearly marked there than he. He was the most "academisable" of men. His use of the French language was a sounding

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

tribute to its beauty. He had the cultus of it; it was almost a religion with him to respect it. In his preface to *Pierre et Jean* he formulated his creed in these words :

“ One has no need of the queer, complicated, multiple and outlandish vocabulary that is forced upon us to-day under the name of artistic writing, to fix the every shade of thought. For the rest the French tongue is a pure spring which the writers with mannerisms have never been able and never will be able to muddy. Each century has thrown into this limpid stream its fashions, its pretentious archaisms, and its affectations and nothing of these useless attempts, of these impotent efforts, has survived. The nature of this language is to be clear, nervous and logical. It does not allow itself to be weakened, obscured or corrupted.”

Elsewhere (in *Mont-Oriol*) he speaks of “ *adjectives de choix, de luxe* ” (those which produce an effect without telling one anything). This horror for useless adjectives he had learned from Flaubert, and even carried it to excess; as where he seeks to elicit pity for a lady reduced to wear a “ skirt of cloth ” and to eat her meals from a “ table of wood,” when two little adjectives would have shown what he meant. This is a rare laches and he is one of the fine scholars of French. For him every fauteuil in the Academy was a-yawn.

In this story, *Un Fils*, Maupassant, through the mouth of the Academician, lays it down that men of his class, the ruling bourgeoisie, have during their lifetimes sexual relations with from two to three hundred women. This will seem to many sociological students a very modest estimate, and will raise a smile

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

on the lips of the "man about town," especially in London. Maupassant's object in mentioning this figure was to point out that, this being so, there is hardly a man—of such morality—who is not the sire of at least one child whose existence he ignores. That was in France, where in Maupassant's day, according to the law laid down in the Code Napoleon, the paternity of an illegitimate child could not be inquired into. Maupassant writes the story as though he had no views one way or another on the subject of the Academician's narrative, but in other stories of his, such as *Le Papa de Simon*, *L'Abandonné*, not to forget *Une Fille de Ferme*, he shows deep sympathy with sinless children of sin. In one of his stories which tells how a man, discovering that a rich and benevolent couple who visit his shop are as a matter of fact his adulterous parents, and who is repudiated with threats by them, follows them, overhears their admission of their parentage and murders them, Maupassant asks what the jury who tried this man should do, and very clearly indicates that in his opinion they should acquit the double parricide. With regard to Maupassant himself, although it may be assumed that the stories about his excessive amateness were based on fact, it may be recorded that Madame de Maupassant after his death, being asked if there were any truth in the claim of three young people in the Yonne department to be illegitimate children of Guy de Maupassant, pointed to a row of his books in her drawing-room and said: "Those are the only children of

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

Monsieur Guy that I know of." These young people were a brother and two sisters. The brother was a bank clerk, one of the sisters was a modiste and the other was at school at the time of Maupassant's death. There being no provision for any such people in Maupassant's will, Maupassant's youth and poverty at the time of his supposed paternity, and the fact that no prolonged association with an individual woman had existed in his life, prove the falsity of this claim. It is formally denied also by Doctor Balestre, who, however, stated that Maupassant did leave a son behind him of whose identity many of his intimates were aware.

The stories about his unbridled indulgence of his passions, although he admitted absolutely no moral reason for restraint, and in this respect also was the simplest child of Nature, seem to have been considerably exaggerated. It is, for instance, absurd to attribute to this cause his hopeless physical and mental breakdown. Nature's punishment for excess in that way takes another form and in any case does not fall on a man of herculean physique at an age when he is in the very prime of his powers and bloom of his virility. His valet's contributions to the *chronique scandaleuse* of his master's life depict him as what the Parisian *boulevardier* of that *fin de siècle* period would consider singularly moderate in the pursuit of gallantry, especially when it is taken into consideration that young, handsome, *un beau Mâle* he was mercilessly pursued by idle, female voluptuaries, even to the

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

very doors of the lunatic asylum to which in part they had driven him. It may also be remembered that Maupassant's manhood was passed during a period when public morality was singularly low in France. Its apologists used to speak of the period as a *fin de siècle*, which apparently was held to condone every kind of moral divergence. Whether the cause was that the century was drawing to a close, or whether it was that the harvest sown in the riotous years of the decadent second empire was then in the reaping, the fact is licentiousness was never more rampant in Paris than between the years 1875 and 1895, the period in a great part of which Guy de Maupassant lived there. One has but to recall the writings of Catulle Mendès, of Jean Reibrach, of René Maizeroy, of Armand Silvestre, of Richard O'Monroy and a score of others, trumpeting abroad daily the glorification of vice in every form, to remember the obscenities of Bal Bullier, the Moulin Rouge and the Elysée Montmartre, the licentious drawings which exceeded in salacity the worst productions of the eighteenth century draughtsmen, just as in talent they fell far below them, to realize the atmosphere in which the bucolic Guy de Maupassant with his bull-like physique breathed and moved. It was gravely stated in a Parisian daily on one occasion during the period referred to that the percentage of married women in Paris who were unfaithful to their husbands was ninety-five, and of husbands still higher, and the only comment that this evoked was the remark that the

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

statistician had been unduly generous in his computation of conjugal fidelity.

There is given a picture of Guy de Maupassant at this time by Pol Neveux, who writes :

" Anybody seeing Maupassant for the first time at the period of *Contes de la Bécasse* and of *Bel-Ami* (1883-1885) was somewhat perplexed. He was a sturdy fellow, rather short, but well-built, with a full forehead under chestnut-coloured hair, a straight nose above a military moustache, a broad chin and powerful neck and shoulders. His aspect was resolute and strong; rather rough and without those particularities which the quality of a man's mind and his social position would suggest. At the same time his hands were delicate and slender and his eyes beautifully shaded.

" He received a caller with the supple manners of a courteous official, who, knowing his duty, listens to applicants and is resigned to hearing longwinded requests. Great politeness but no expansion whatever. With a faint smile on his face he let you go on speaking and his calm perplexed you. His eyes seemed to disclaim any desire to scrutinize you or even to look you in the face, yet all the time you felt that he was watching you."

Another contemporary picture of Maupassant is given by Léon Daudet in his book of *Souvenirs*. It may be noted that Léon Daudet is no admirer of Maupassant's writings, which he is wont to describe as "*salonnard*" (drawing-room stuff). He used to meet Maupassant in the early 'eighties at the house of Charpentier, the publisher, where Maupassant was a frequent caller although Charpentier published very little for him. Léon Daudet writes :

" At that time he was a man of regular features, dark, rather fat, slow of intelligence like a country bumpkin and generally silent. He was, then, not as yet suffering from that mis-

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

anthropy, broken now and again by acute attacks of snobbishness, which some time later were developed in him by general paralysis. But already in those days he used to rub up against doctors as though they were miracles of 'thaumaturgical science. He used to buttonhole them in doorways and ante-chambers and question them at length. Those were the days when the 'human document' was in fashion. People used to say: 'Guy'—everybody called him Guy—'is very conscientious. He is collecting information on certain pathological cases which are to be dealt with in his next novel.' Many scabrous, or queer stories were current about him, and I have always thought that his cerebral upset began much earlier than was supposed."

It has been seen that already, in 1882, a specialist detected in Maupassant's eyes the proof that he was doomed to general paralysis, and a knowledge of that disease which now obtains allows one to fix the infection which caused this as having been occurred five or six years earlier. It may be noted that Léon Daudet, who is a skilled doctor, speaks of Maupassant's "tréponème" as though there had never been any question amongst his intimates of the existence of this terrible bacillus in his blood.

It is a curious thing that Léon Daudet, who is a thoroughly kind-hearted man, was not moved to pity at the spectacle of these continual consultations of doctors (even of a student in his first year). How poignantly it reveals the Great Anxiety that was gnawing at the heart of the sturdy, bucolic, taciturn man, the Anxiety that helped the tréponème to drive him to insanity and death! Apart from *Mont-Oriol*, which was written much later than the period to which Daudet refers, none of Maupassant's books deal with

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

medical subjects, and *Mont-Oriol* only serves as a vehicle for the caricaturing of the profession and their remedies. It was therefore not with any desire for information for his books that he seized every opportunity to hear the opinions of doctors. He was like a drowning man clutching at straws. Some doctor might some day say something that would give him hope in the hopeless disaster of his life, afflicted with a hidden disease of which at that time nothing was known except that it was one of the most hideous scourges that afflict humanity. Daudet's testimony casts a lurid light on what was going on beneath that placid and smiling exterior.



## CHAPTER XXII

Stories Tried on the Belgians—Maupassant's First Novel—  
Success of *Une Vie*—Maupassant and Brother-Authors—  
The New Home at Etretat—François's Observations—  
Guy's Life at Etretat—Maupassant and Swinburne—  
Maupassant's Love of Hoaxing—The Countess and the  
Dolls—The Marquis and the Frail.

**I**N 1882 Maupassant published nothing in book form in Paris but issued a volume of stories entitled *Mademoiselle Fifi* at Brussels, through Kistemaeckers. This suggests that Maupassant was rather doubtful as to the reception that even Paris would give to certain of the stories in this volume. *Mademoiselle Fifi* herself is of course an outcast woman, but her heroic gesture redeems her and nobody in Paris could blame the author for glorifying so patriotic a young woman. The volume also contained six other stories, of which perhaps *Le Lit* and *Une Aventure Parisienne* may have seemed to Maupassant fitter for publication in Brussels than in Paris. For in those days Kistemaeckers had a very curious reputation amongst publishers on the Continent. Maupassant was fully aware of this reputation, as is shown by the following entry in Goncourt's diary for Feb. 17th, 1882 :

" Oh, the dirty hypocrisy of certain critics ! Did not one of these critics say about *La Faustin*, that the duties of his profession had obliged him to run his eye over the works of the Marquis de Sade ? And one day lately, Guy de Maupassant

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

told me that this same critic had begged him to ask Kistemaeckers and other Belgian publishers for a consignment of obscene books which are published on the other side of the frontier."

It was as though a British author that same year had first issued a volume in Holywell Street, before taking it to a publisher in Paternoster Row. The Kistemaeckers edition of *Mademoiselle Fifi* was a luxurious one, with an etching by Just. It was sold out almost immediately. When Maupassant gave it to Havard to publish in Paris, he had apparently come to the conclusion that the public would raise no objection on the grounds of morality to anything that he might publish, and accordingly among the eleven stories which he added to this volume were *Reveil* and notably *Le Remplaçant*, which seemed at the time—the world has advanced since then—rather risky. But the volume contained also such magnificent work as *Deux Amis*, *A Cheval*, *La Bûche* and the terrible *Nuit de Noël* and was received with the greatest enthusiasm. As Heredia wrote: "Each new book of his made him still greater. This was glory. And we all admired in him that marvellous exuberance of vitality which by one of Nature's miracles mixed all the flowers of spring with the most delicious fruits of maturity, while nothing seemed to stop or diminish the flow of sap to that powerful brain." And again: "Maupassant's life seems to be nothing but a journey marked by triumphant stages."

In February, 1883, the *Gil Blas* began the publica-

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

tion of a novel by Guy de Maupassant. This was *Une Vie*. It ran daily from February 25th till April 6th. It was his first long novel, and its success was immediate and great. During the year, Victor Havard sold twenty-four thousand copies and put the twenty-fifth thousand on sale in 1884, when he was also publishing the author's *Clair de Lune* stories. It was a bad year for publishers and booksellers. On August 5th, Havard writes to Maupassant :

"I hand you enclosed a statement of your account on July 1st. The last book went off well enough, but the earlier ones didn't go, as I had hoped they would. . . . It is quite true we are going through a critical period which has seriously affected the book trade. Business is almost at a standstill and if this situation continues much longer, I shan't have a big quarterly settlement to make with you."

Maupassant had published in 1883, through another firm, his *Contes de la Bécasse*. This firm was insolvent and Havard advises Maupassant how best to get out of their hands and to rescue the unsold stock of this volume of short stories, advice which Maupassant acted upon. Havard also informs him that a Mr John Eggers, of London, has been applying for the right to translate *Une Vie* into English : "To a first letter from this person," he writes, "I answered, on July 25th, that if he was prepared to pay the sum of 500 Francs (£20) in Paris, I would put him in touch with you to get your authorization. . . . It is up to you now, *mon cher*, to follow the business up. I didn't want to bother you with the matter until I knew whether the

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

man really meant business; . . . I advise you to be on guard against those chaps. Let nothing go without cash."

Although Maupassant was considered so terribly businesslike with publishers, he certainly did not show himself so in his correspondence with fellow-authors on business matters. An English writer who was residing in Paris at the time that *Yvette* was published, and who wrote to him about the right to translate this story into English, received from Maupassant's villa *La Guillette*, Etretat, an autograph letter from him couched in the kindest language, telling him to go ahead with the translation and that as to terms "we will do what is usual in these matters." Havard's advice was not put into practice here. But Maupassant was always kind and courteous to brother-writers. Here, for instance, is a letter he wrote to Josephin Péladan, better known as Sâr Peladan, of whom no more need be said than that his standing in Paris was not such as to command any high respect, especially from an author of Maupassant's standing. This letter was written from Tunis in 1887:

"Sir and Dear Confrère,

"I read what you do with great interest, an interest all the keener because it is so different from the things towards which my nature drives me.

"You tell me that we two have ideals very much opposed to each other. That is so, but men don't choose their ideals, they submit to them, just as one submits to the shape of one's body. One thinks and one produces according to faculties, which I consider absolutely unchangeable; but one can have a bound-

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

less admiration for producers of every kind and variety when one's comprehension is a large one.

"Receive, my dear Confrère, the expression of my very devoted sentiments.

" GUY DE MAUPASSANT."

Péladan was nine years younger than Maupassant and was not being taken seriously at that time either as a wizard, a Rosicrucian or as a writer. Yet because he was a brother writer Maupassant wrote to him in this courteous, deferential way.

In 1883, Maupassant's position was so assured a one that he had built for himself down at Etretat a small country house, the chalet *La Guillette*. It was built from his own plans and according to his taste. It was partly a villa, partly a Norman farm. The house was at the end of a secluded garden. There was a creeper-grown balcony joining the two wings of the chalet. It was to *La Guillette* that he liked to retire when wearied of Parisian and Riviera social life. It was there that he wrote some of his finest work, notably a large part of his novel : *Pierre et Jean*, which some people consider his best book. It was here that, in 1887, he wrote his famous study on the novel, which was the original preface to *Pierre and Jean* and the sub-editing of which by the *Figaro* provoked Maupassant's famous quarrel with that organ.

The small Government clerk of 1880 was now a well-to-do man. He could readily count on an assured £2000 or £3000 a year. He had a country house of his own, and in November engaged a valet. This was

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

the famous François who later published his *Souvenirs* of Guy de Maupassant, for which some people blamed him, knowing Maupassant's horror of letting the public know anything about his private life. But Maupassant never stated that this veto extended beyond his lifetime. "*Moi vivant*," he used to say, "the public is to know nothing." François's book was well received and is to-day in its sixth edition of 1000 copies. Its indiscretions may rather be welcomed as they help to give one a better impression of Maupassant's *affaires de cœur* than one might gather from the boulevard legends about him. The book opens with a portrait of his master as he first saw him on November 1st, 1883:

"We entered the drawing-room, where I found myself in the presence of two gentlemen who were standing warming themselves with their backs to the fire. The first was a brawny sort of chap, high in colour, with a thick, fair moustache and very wavy chestnut hair. His nightshirt was open and showed a powerful neck. He wore a tight-fitting pair of trousers and some Oriental slippers. 'That's the boss,' said I to myself."

Maupassant didn't seem to know the terms that a Parisian cook-valet should be offered, and the proposal he made to François "did not please me in a single respect." François says he is very sorry and goes out. A quarter of an hour later he is asked back and requested to name his own terms and conditions. "In two minutes everything was settled." François begins pulling out his testimonials. "Oh, don't bother about that," says Maupassant, "I shall very soon see whether you are what I want." And engaged to come

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

next morning at eight o'clock and start work, François cooked Maupassant's luncheon on November 2nd, and two days later was taken down to *La Guillette* by his master. At *La Guillette*, Maupassant's female cook tells François that apart from some little whims the master was an excellent man, a good fellow, one of the country lads, whom everybody called by his Christian name, and "such a swimmer—there's nobody like him." It was said that Guy, his brother Hervé and their cousin Louis Le Poittevin could swim round the rock known at *L'Aiguille du Sud-Ouest*, a matter of six kilometres (nearly four miles). François's first impressions were that Maupassant was the fastest strawberry-picker he had ever seen, that he hated waiting-rooms at stations and that no matter how cold it was used to wait on the platform for the train, that "he was a very learned man and had already published several books and had been visited by a publisher, no doubt anxious to get the sale of what Monsieur was writing." François sleeps in what was Maupassant's bathroom, which was installed in an inverted fishing-smack. On the second evening François attends his master to the garden gate. A carriage drives up and a lady, who is much wrapped up, alights therefrom. Maupassant takes her cavalier-fashion by the hand and François lights them, walking backwards.

"In the antechamber, my master rids the lady of a whole series of shawls. He was assiduously attentive and most amiable. I noticed how great was the winning charm of his words when he wished them to be so."

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

François thought the lady looked like an empress, and Desirée the cook tells him she was that on the left hand. "This lady was Napoleon's mistress." (Napoleon le Petit is meant.) "Everybody here knows that Napoleon was crazy about her and gave her a title." This was doubtless the Countess de C——. She dines that night with Maupassant, who escorts her home at ten o'clock, telling François not to wait up for him as he has his keys. Maupassant spent ten days at *La Guillette* that November and seems to have done little but rest himself. His mail-bag was heavier and heavier day by day. Paris and business were calling him back. One of his pastimes was to go after lunch and feed the gold-fish. "These knew he was coming and were waiting for him at the surface of the pool. Lots of little birds had got into the habit of sharing in the distribution. They kept fluttering round my master, swooping down at his feet, so numerous, so eager, so trustful, that he had to watch out so as not to tread upon them."

When they got back to Paris, the valet's first care was to try and tidy up Maupassant's study. "But I did not know where to begin. I found books, pamphlets, newspapers all heaped up along the walls, against the pieces of furniture, even all round the legs of the chairs and tables. On the tables themselves they were mountains of them. I polished and waxed the parquet floors every day, but it was a waste of time, as the master used to walk from his washhandstand to his writing-table with towels dripping with water." The



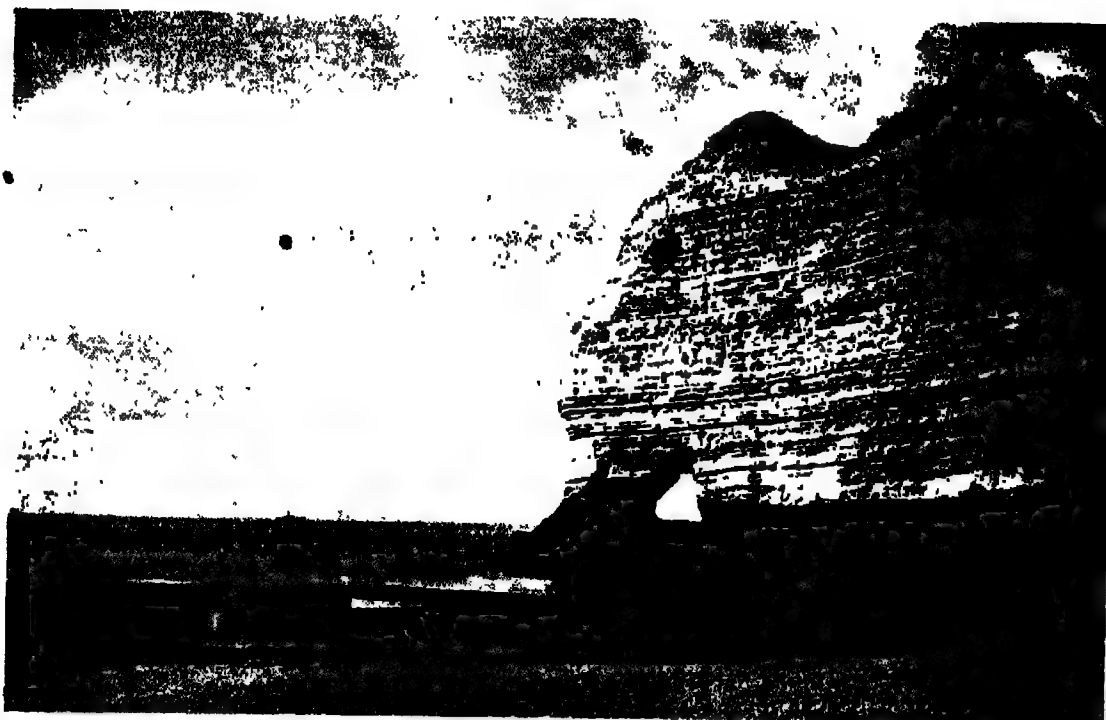
## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

concierge at this house had a high opinion of Maupassant's personal courage and indifference to pain, and told François that he had fought in 1870, but that after he had retreated to Havre he spent most of his time there at the hospital nursing the smallpox patients "like a sister of charity." Other writers besides François have given us pictures of poor Guy at *La Guillette*, where some of his happiest hours ashore—he was never really happy except afloat—were spent. Henry Fouquier, who was down there several times with him, said of him, at the inauguration of his statue in Paris in 1900 :

"Despising the restraints of society and caring nothing at all about holding his place amongst 'men of the world,' he used to live down there like a countryman and like a sailor. In his long shooting tramps, or his adventurous fishing excursions at sea, he used to use up with no danger to himself, the force of his temperament and the ardour of his blood. A blending of ruggedness and of *glace*, his Normandy was a restful frame to his genius and one appropriate to it."

Lacour of *La Nouvelle Revue* spent some days at Etretat in 1887 and was frequently at *La Guillette*.

"I was admitted," he writes, "to the inner circle of privileged friends who used to dine with him at *La Guillette* once or twice a week. Conversation at these dinners was rarely literary. Maupassant didn't care to talk about his work, or his books and wasn't keen either on talking about other writers. But we gossiped like blazes. Maupassant, though he didn't make a point of finding out people's faults, specially noticed what was ridiculous in folks he knew and took a morbid pleasure in exposing them. I believe indeed that he often used to invent things about people, just to gratify his pessimistic sensitiveness."



ROCKS AND BEACH AT ETRE FAT, SHOWING SCENE WHERE GUY SAVED  
SWINBURNE FROM DROWNING.



MAUPASSANT ROWING LADIES OUT TO "BEL-AMI."



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

As for instance, the stories he used to tell about Swinburne. Swinburne was a visitor to Etretat and on one occasion, having rather exceeded his strength in the water, was assisted to land by Maupassant. The two poets afterwards saw something of each other. It is certain Maupassant had no conception whatever of the greatness of the man whose life he had saved. He frequently spoke of Swinburne, and usually in a disparaging manner. Maurice Talmeyr was down at *La Guillette* in 1886, and at lunch one day was told by Maupassant that Swinburne had been staying the previous summer at a villa which nobody would rent that year. "As though it were the House of the Devil."

Talmeyr asks for particulars, and Maupassant tells him that while it's quite possible Swinburne might have some talent, he was represented by the Etretat natives as uncannily eccentric. For instance, he could only compose poetry when sucking the fingers of a skeleton hand. "He always has one on his writing-table and takes it as one takes the hand of a woman, caresses it, kisses it, squeezes it and ends up by shoving it into his mouth, and then, it appears, he turns out the finest English poetry ever written."

Maupassant went on to tell Talmeyr that Swinburne had had to leave Etretat on account "of a drama far from ordinary and enormously ridiculous." Swinburne lived with a huge gorilla, and one day this gorilla, in a fit of neurasthenia, committed suicide by cutting its throat. "Yes," he said, "exactly as I say.

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

'And this is how it happened. Swinburne used to live in the villa I've told you of, which I'll show you later. What he did there nobody exactly knows. But I should say we may suppose that he worked there and wrote his poems. What is certain is that he hardly ever received anybody there and that he lived with a monkey. And this monkey, every minute, gave most fearful yells, as if murder was going on inside. People used to collect outside, wondering what was the matter. But there was nothing to be seen except the garden railings and the closed windows, from behind which proceeded this fearful shindy. There was enough there to make gossip in a small town. But when it was made known that the monkey had its throat cut, that it had committed suicide and that the mysterious Englishman, about whom it had been reported that he wrote poetry while sucking the fingers of a dead man, was leaving the place in despair because his gorilla had killed itself, you can imagine what was set seething in all those heads; the visions that all those brains summoned forth, and you can hear the gossip, the rumours and the stories. . . ."

Here Maupassant was "pulling Talmeyr's leg" just for the fun of the thing. He was as much in earnest as when he told people in Madame Adam's *salon* that there was a good deal to be said for cannibalism, that he had tasted woman's flesh and had found it so nice that he had asked for a second helping. A very intimate lady-friend of his says of him: "He loved getting people to swallow the most extraordinary

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

yarns and was delighted when he could dupe a credulous audience."

There may have been a little gossip about Swinburne at Etretat, because Swinburne's excitability and curious appearance always provoked comment—not always amiable—in France. After his visit to Victor Hugo's house, it was generally reported in Paris that he was a hopeless addict to drink. But the only thing remembered about him in Etretat was that he was no match at swimming with "Monsieur Guy" and that it was lucky for him that that morning Monsieur Guy had been in the water too.

François gives several stories of practical jokes played by his master, and he himself seems to have had to listen to all kinds of absurd stories, told just to make fun of him. Many of Maupassant's jokes will be severely blamed by Anglo-Saxons, but it should not be forgotten that from an early date his magnificent brain was impaired by a ruthless disease, apparent in those days only to oculists. Otherwise one would not understand how a gentleman could do many of the things he did, a gentleman with hereditary instincts.

For instance, one day Countess P——, the beautiful young wife of a Polish nobleman, sent him as a present, or rather in payment of a wager, twenty-four little dolls, dressed, six as widows, twelve as nuns, and six as fashionable ladies. Maupassant had long been paying court in vain to the young countess, who, her marriage being sterile, and the prince, her father-in-law, being most anxious for a grandchild, was some-

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

what in the position of the heroine of *L'Heritage*, the author of which apparently was disposed to play here the rôle of "le beau Maze," but had been sternly repelled. The day after Maupassant had received the present, a parcel was delivered to the Countess. It contained the six dolls which were dressed as widows, but the skirts of these had all been padded out to give them the appearance of their being *sub invocatione Lucinae*. There was a line in Maupassant's writing: "*Toutes dans une même nuit.*" François describes how he and his master had spent the previous evening in stuffing the dolls with pieces of old handkerchiefs, François cutting the linen, Maupassant working with a bodkin. The *farce* was considered a very good one. Paris laughed over it, and more than one chronicler has recorded it as a specimen of the novelist's humour and sense of *à propos*. Nor does it appear that the Countess or her men-folk took any offence.

One day, in Paris, Maupassant invites to dinner fifteen people, including four *demi-mondaines*, one of whom was *la belle H*——, against whom Maupassant had a score, and who was to be the victim of one of his jokes. The four *demi-mondaines* had been informed that they would meet at dinner an enormously wealthy Spanish gentleman, who was anxious to contract a left-handed union with a French lady of facile morals. The dinner was held. The Spaniard, who was introduced as the Marquis de San Pola and who came to dinner in a dress-coat, a yellow waistcoat and light greyish-blue trousers, announced his intention

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

of setting up a splendid establishment, with the dame of his choice, and asked all sorts of questions as to mansions to let, upholsterers and horse-dealers. Visions of a princely installation rose before the eyes of *la belle H——*, to whom to her great joy the handkerchief was at last thrown. By that time the Marquis was drunk and fell downstairs as he was escorting his conquest to her home.

"After they had gone," relates François, "delirium of laughter reigned. Everybody squirmed with hilarity, some had tears in their eyes, some were leaping into the air, some were rolling on the ground in uncontrollable merriment. Monsieur de Maupassant, holding his sides, stamped on the floor with joy that his *force* had succeeded so splendidly. He knew that next morning at dawn, the marquis would put a louis on *la belle H——*'s mantelpiece and take French leave."

The "*belle H——*" was a very pretty, young woman, "as fresh as a rose and graceful in the extreme." She had "a very pleasant, kindly face." It is quite possible she had heard the rumours about Maupassant's health, which had even reached Flaubert's ears down in the country, and had prudently handed him the basket. *Hinc illae lacrymae.*



## CHAPTER XXIII

The Artist-Lovers—The Girl and the King—Zola and Female Correspondents—A Letter to Maupassant—He Answers Miss Hastings—Sixty Correspondents—Miss Hastings Reveals Herself—The Friendship Does Not Progress—Reasons for This—Maupassant as a Lover—François Cited.

“**I** CAN no more go out at all, but my poor Bastien-Lepage gets out; so then he has himself carried here and settles himself in an armchair, with his legs propped up on cushions; with me quite close to him in another armchair, and so we remain till six in the evening.

“ I am dressed in a jumble of lace, of plush, it's all white, but whites of different tones, white upon white; Bastien-Lepage's eye dilates with pleasure at the sight of me.

“ ‘ Oh, if I could paint,’ he says.

“ And I?

“ Done for : this year's picture.”

Nineteen days later, the young woman, whose adorable hand had traced these lines, was dead. It was consumption that killed her. The painter followed her into the grave forty days later. He was killed by what is supposed to have killed the great Napoleon. The woman was twenty-four and the man was thirty-six in 1884, the year in which they died. Her admiration for him was great. If they had lived she would have married him.



Agrie's Immersion  
Mrs. Saltatiana  
Marie Bashkirtseff

MARIE BASHKIRTSEFF, WITH A FACSIMILE OF HER SIGNATURE.



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

It was the same adorable little hand that some eleven months earlier had written in the same diary :

---

“Why does God make people suffer? If it be He who created the world, why did He create evil, suffering, wickedness?”

Before disease ravaged her body, she had been one of the loveliest of the sky-children. Sky-child, because her soul, till her last breath, had retained, unsullied by the world, the beauty with which it was endowed in that imperial city whence she came.

Once in Naples, she had stopped King Victor Emmanuel on the staircase of her hotel, just for the “honour of speaking to a good king.” The *régalant’uomo*, “who was a connoisseur in the matter of belle ragazze,” spoke of the little Russian beauty for days afterwards. He even sent an aide-de-camp to her mother to tell her not to scold the girl for an intrusion which had been so delightful to him.

She had an unbounded enthusiasm for men who were great and who did great things. At one time she “adored” Zola the man, because of her boundless admiration for his books. Doubtless she wrote to him to tell him so. He would certainly not answer her letter. He had a very poor opinion of women who write to strangers. He once said: “I have never attached any importance to letters from women, and I do not think that I have answered more than four in my life.”

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

One morning somewhere in 1883, Guy de Maupassant found amongst the mass of letters that every postman now brought the successful writer, the following communication, in a sprawling hand :

" Sir,

" I read you almost with delight. You adore the truths of Nature and find in them a poetry which is really great, while at the same time you stir our emotions with details of sentiments which are so profoundly human that we recognize ourselves in them and love you with an egotistical love. A mere phrase, this? . . . Be indulgent. The heart is sincere.

" It is obvious that I should like to say exquisite and striking things to you, but it's very difficult, just so, all at once. I regret it all the more because you are sufficiently remarkable to make one dream romantically of becoming the confidant of your beautiful soul, that is, if your soul be beautiful.

" If your soul be not beautiful and if you don't let yourself in for 'that sort of thing,' I regret it for you, in the first place, and then I class you as a manufacturer of literature and pass along my road.

" It's a year since I have been on the point of writing to you, but several times I have thought that I had formed an exaggerated opinion about you and that it wasn't worth while. Then suddenly, two days ago, I read in *Le Gaulois* that someone had honoured you with a gracious epistle and that you wanted this good person's address so that you might answer the letter. I became at once very jealous; your literary merits dazzled me afresh and here I am.

" Now, listen to me, I shall always remain unknown to you (for good and all) and I don't even want to see you from far off—your face might displease me, who knows? All I know is that you are young and that you are not married, two essential points in the blue of the clouds.

" But I warn you that I am charming. This sweet thought will encourage you to answer me. It seems to me that if I were a man, I should not wish to have any dealings, even epistolary, with a frumpish old Englishwoman, whatever one may think.

" MISS HASTINGS."

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

The answer was to be sent to "R.G.D." Poste Restante at the Madeleine Post Office.

At that moment Maupassant was in correspondence with, or being written to by, sixty male-hunting women. "Miss Hastings," however, seemed different from the usual correspondent. For one thing her flattery was qualified, for another she wrote well. Then she described herself as charming, but—the usual lure—inaccessible. And she spoke with dislike of the English, whom Maupassant liked so little.

As a matter of fact, "Miss Hastings" had written terrible things about the English, which were published after her death. After the killing of the so-called Prince Imperial by the Zulus, she exclaimed :

"And to tell oneself that this nation (the British) has not been exterminated, that one cannot annihilate their accursed island and this cold, barbarous, perfidious, infamous people."

These views would have met with Guy's approval.

At any rate Miss Hastings was not disappointed, when a day or two later she called at the Madeleine post-office to see if there was any letter in the poste restante addressed to "R.G.D." Maupassant had answered her and at length. Her stationery, the writing, her style, the scent that emanated from the paper, the crest on the seal, all had told him that "Miss Hastings" was a member of that class of society which, just then at any rate, he was not averse from cultivating. He tells her that she had no need for jealousy of the correspondent whose address he

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

had asked for, as it was a man. He adds that he has sixty women writing to him and that he does not know whether he should make a confidante of someone of whom he knows so little.

The woman, in her second letter, admits having received his answer with "childish delight." Her letter is a charming piece of raillery. She tells him that her jealousy about his correspondent's sex was purely spiritual and without importance. She adds that she never asked him for his confidences. As to his latest writings, she has read one of his *chroniques* in *Le Gaulois*, three times, but she chaffs him about his story *La Mère Sauvage* (the old peasant-woman who revenges the death of her son by burning alive in a barn some Prussian soldiers quartered upon her). She calls this story *une vieille rengaine* (a hackneyed old story). As to herself, she writes :

"However, if it's only a vague description of me that you want before bestowing on me the beauties of your old soul which lacks perspicacity, one might, let's say, mention fair hair, average stature. Born between the years 1812 and 1863. And as regards morals . . . but, no, I should seem to be boasting and you would learn right off that I hail from Marseilles."

Maupassant had now become interested in the correspondence and hopes to evoke sympathy by describing the wretchedness of his life and *métier*. Here is a passage from the second letter to her :

"Everything in life is almost indifferent to me, men, women, events. This is my true creed, and I add that I attach no more importance to myself than to others. Everything divides

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

itself up into boredom, buffoonery and wretchedness. I take everything with indifference. I spend two-thirds of my time in boring myself profoundly. I employ the other third in writing lines which I sell as dearly as possible, while deploring the necessity of plying this abominable trade."

He explains his "hackneyed stories" and he presses her to give him more particulars about herself.

Her answer is a chastisement. She writes :

"So you bore yourself, you take everything with indifference and you haven't a ha-porth of poetry in you. . . . Do you really think you can scare me?

"I can see you from here, you must have a pretty big stomach, a waistcoat made of some indeterminate cloth, too short for you and with the lowest button unfastened. Very well, you will still interest me. I only don't understand how you can bore yourself. As for me, I am sometimes sad, discouraged or in a rage, but to be bored. . . . Never.

"You are not the man I am looking for."

She explains that she is not looking for any man, and continues :

"Well, now I'll answer your questions, and that with all sincerity, as I don't like to play with the naiveté of a man of genius who dozes off, as he smokes his cigar after dinner."

(In this letter she enclosed a drawing of a stout man dozing in an armchair under a palm tree by the seaside : he has a cigar in his mouth and there is a glass of beer on a table at his side.)

She describes herself :

"Thin? Oh, no, but not fat either. Woman of the world, sentimental, romantic? But what do you understand by that? It seems to me that there's room for all that in one and the same person. It all depends on the moment, the opportunity, circumstances. I am an opportunist and above all a victim of moral contagions. . . . So it may happen that I may be lacking in poetry at times, just like you.



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

"My scent? Virtue. In common use, none.

"Greedy? Yes, or rather gourmet, difficult. My ear is small, not very regular, but pretty. Grey eyes. Yes, I am a musician, but not as good a pianist as I expect the undermistress in your boardinghouse is."

Here she refers to *la Maison Tellier*.

"Are you satisfied with my docility? If yes, unfasten another button and think of me while the twilight falls. If not . . . TANT PIS, I find I have given you a lot in exchange for your sham confidences. . . . May I venture to ask you who are your favourite composers and painters?"

She concludes "If I were a man." This probably refers to something in Maupassant's letter which had aroused her maiden indignation, so susceptible in the Slav races.

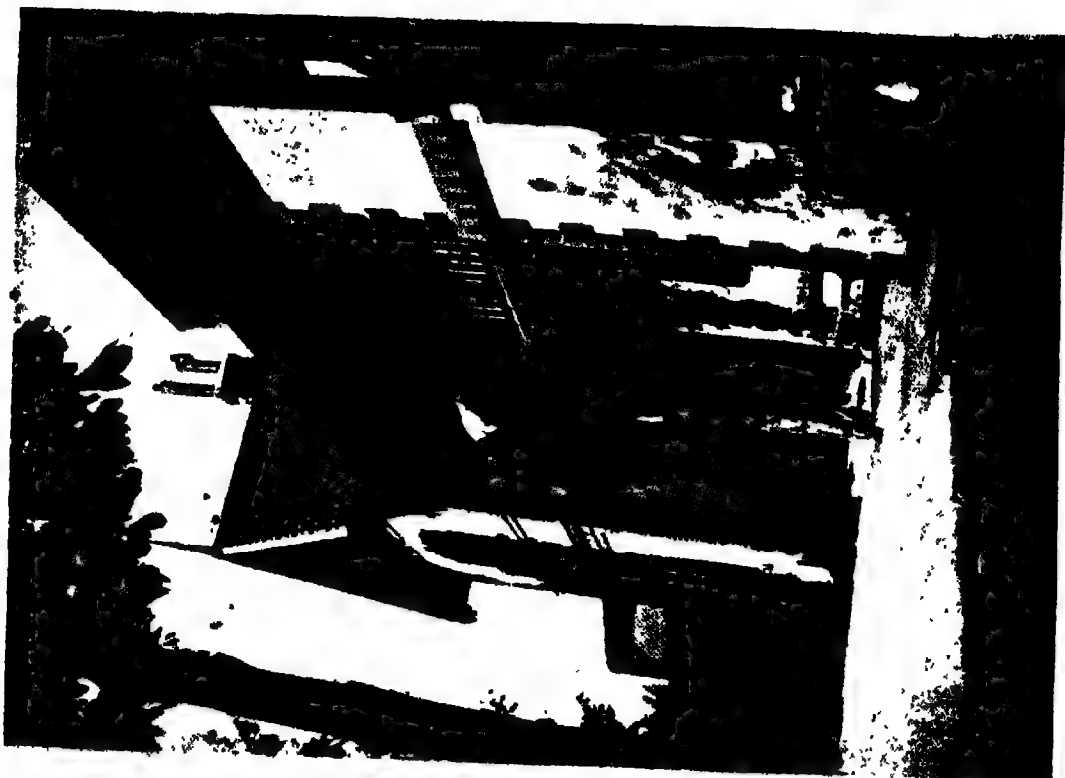
In his third letter, Maupassant reverts to the despair that fills his life. He has not yet realized that these self-condolences are most revolting to the girl whom he is now most anxious to meet. He says:

"I haven't a single taste that I can't at will tear from me, not a desire at which I do not snap my fingers, not a hope that does not make me either smile or laugh. I ask myself why I move at all, why I go here or there, why I take the odious trouble to earn money, since I find no fun in spending it."

In this letter he seems to have repeated the offence which had provoked the "If I were a man" from the woman. She describes this letter of his as "infamous" and bids him return her her letters, adding: "As to yours, I have already sold them at an unheard-of price in America." And she adds: "Adieu, avec plaisir."



PORTRAIT OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT AT THE TIME OF  
THE BASHKIRSEFF LETTERS.



"LA GUILLETTE," MAUPASSANT'S HOUSE AT ETRETIAT.



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

The correspondence, however, did not end here. Further letters that, as "Miss Hastings" and afterwards in her own name, Marie Bashkirtseff wrote to Guy de Maupassant can be read in the published letters of this marvellous girl. Her own story of her *affaire* with the author of *La Maison Tellier* will doubtless be made public, as there is being published at last in Paris a series of extracts which, when the famous diary was first printed, about thirty years ago, were elided first by André Theuriet, its original editor, and then by Madame Bashkirtseff after she had taken the editing away from the author of *La Maison des Deux Barbeaux*. In view of the rigid watch that Madame de Maupassant kept over her son's memory, it may have been thought prudent on the part of Marie's executors not to make this story public. Marie's own account should be interesting. But already now one can estimate what it was that had attracted her to Guy de Maupassant. From public repute he seemed to fill most of the conditions that she looked for in "the man" she had been seeking for as a mate, as the mate she was determined to have, ever since as a child of thirteen she fell madly in love with the Duke of Hamilton at Nice. Guy was celebrated, his name indicated noble birth, he was known to be making a large income, and physically he came up to the high standard she had fixed. People familiar with the wonderful "Journal" which made Mr Gladstone say of its author that "this young girl was a prodigious being, whose name crowned with light

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

would go down to the consummation of the centuries," will remember many entries describing her wishes as to a husband. Money was ever a consideration. She herself had about £3000 a year and she thought that if she loved a man, he ought to have at least fifteen or twenty thousand francs a year income of his own. On the other hand she declared herself ready to marry a man with a very large fortune, even if she did not care for him and even if his fortune had been dishonestly acquired. But no doubt she was prepared to try and fall in love with Maupassant. She had just emerged from a wild passion for Paul de Cassagnac, the editor of the Bonapartist journal, *L'Autorité*, who was a married man and who probably knew no more of Marie's adoration for him than the Duke of Hamilton had done, of whom she wrote that she had only seen him ten times, had never spoken to him and that he probably ignored her very existence. Cassagnac had been introduced to her, but though her emotion in his presence had been so intense that she nearly fainted, she does not appear to have betrayed her feelings towards him. Cassagnac had displaced in her heart a young Roman Count, for before she met him she had written in her diary :

" Nice, Jan. 17th, 1877.—When then shall I know what it is, this love of which so much is said? I would have loved A—— (the Roman Count), but I despise him. I did love the Duke of Hamilton, being a child, and to the pitch of madness. This love was entirely due to his fortune, his name, the Duke's extravagances and an imagination—quite above the average."

Cassagnac was a reputed duellist and Marie adored

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

combativeness in men. She was a female of the cave-men epoch in that respect. When she met Cassagnac she was heart-whole. As she says :

“ So here I am free. I adore nobody, but I am looking for the man I shall adore. That will have to be soon; for life without love is a bottle without wine in it. Of course, the wine must be good.”

What had made her first think she could love “A——,” the Roman Count, was seeing him grappling with a common man to rescue her bouquet under her balcony during the Carnival in Rome.

“ He looked like a lion, like a tiger. I can still see his clutching hands squeezing the lout’s throat. . . . Now, by such an act, a man can get himself loved right away.”

That *beau mâle*, Guy de Maupassant, was known to be of herculean strength and altogether fearless. A very cave-man in that respect. And there were so many points on which she agreed with him, mistrust of God, contempt for the priests (she actually compared the Pope’s mouth to that “of an old dog”), hatred of the human race. She speaks of the “horrible smell of human bodies,” and one of her entries—which might have been written by Maupassant himself—runs : “What is there more stupid, more cowardly, viler than the human race? Nothing, nothing.” She has Guy’s terror of death, probably for the same reason as his, the knowledge that she carried within her a fatal, unrelenting disease. “Oh, when I think that one lives only once, and that each minute brings one nearer to death, I feel I am going mad.”

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

Marie was prepared to love Guy, in spite of his "infamous letter," and might have married him—for they afterwards met and she admired him physically as much as he did her, whom he describes in *En Voyage*. But while Marie had of course no thought of mating without marriage, Guy had, at least at that time, a strong aversion from matrimony. In many of his stories he speaks with repulsion or ridicule of the married state. As Professor Esch points out, "he never speaks of marriage except with sarcasm." In *La Bûche*, he writes: "It's far better to find a good, solid friend" (than a wife) "and to grow old in his company." The union of the sexes under the aegis of the law is for him the "acme of bourgeois imbecility," and in *Lui* he quite frankly declares that he has always preferred "free love, the only merry and good thing on earth."

Even if Marie, with her tremendous pride, could have consented to such a union, she would have exacted a long courtship. Maupassant lost as little time in getting to the consummation of his desires as did Napoleon Bonaparte. With both, it was *une affaire de canapé*. It may be surmised that when Marie's own account of this affair becomes available it will be seen that what broke off their incipient friendship were cave-man tactics on Maupassant's part. These she could admire as practised towards others, but as to her own sacrosanct person, the least approach so revolted her that having once kissed "A——" she used, for months afterwards, to consult her mirror,

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

to see whether the contact had not changed the colour of her lips to a hideous hue. In this couple, more than in any couple, that one can think of, the woman indeed held what she had to bestow as a priceless treasure, which for the man was but a moment's pastime, an idle toy. Poor Marie, to look for worship from the man who had been a fifth partner in the favours of Mademoiselle Mouche!

She consoled herself rapidly and did eventually meet the man whom she fell in love with, madly. In her bag, after her death, was found a note which she had written with the intention of sending it to this man, on the eve of his marriage with another. "If it be true," she wrote, "that you are marrying for money, learn that a woman who is richer than your fiancée loves you more than any other woman in the world. Then why marry that one, when there is a younger one, who, on a word from you, would come and lie down at your feet, submissive and adoring?"

She seems to have borne no grudge against Maupassant for the *spretæ injuria formæ*, and in the preface which she wrote, a few months before her death, to her "Journal," she tells people to consult him amongst other writers as to the value of her confessions as a "human document." It may be noted that while she writes "M." Zola and "M." de Goncourt she refers to him as "Maupassant," without any "Monsieur" or "de"—a touch of intimacy.

At the time she wrote this she had begun that idyll with poor Bastien-Lepage, the unspeakable sadness of



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

which is suggested in the lines from her diary which are quoted at the opening of this chapter. Maupassant was the very last man in Paris whom Marie should have approached in quest of happiness. He was perfectly unmoral and admitted no restrictions whatever in the indulgence of what he considered a perfectly natural function. His views on the matter are expounded in scores of his stories. As a natural result of the solicitations to which his fine physique and great notoriety exposed him to from idle, female voluptuaries, he had a very considerable contempt for the sex and showed very little consideration in getting rid of women who had ceased to interest him. François relates (the date is a year before Marie's death) :

“ On Dec. 15th, my master opens the door of the drawing-room. He looked gloomy. The night before he had been to an evening party at a Highness's house and had brought back with him a foreign lady, who had reddish fair hair, who was not pretty, but young and appetizing. After breakfast, she flew away, but not for long; she was back again at four o'clock: she had to wait till half-past six or seven and then had to go, as my master was dining out. Next day at nine in the morning, there she was again. That went on for four days; after which my master said to me: ‘ You can do with her what you like. I want no more of her. She tells me each time that she is leaving for Vienna, and always keeps coming back. Kick her out ’—(Maupassant uses a very coarse word here)—‘ if you have to.’ ”

No, Guy de Maupassant would not have been a suitable mate for the girl who used to say to God on her knees :

“ O God, give me the Duke of Hamilton. I will love him and will make him happy. I shall be happy, I too, and I'll be

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

good to the poor. It's a sin to think that one can buy God's favours with good works, but I don't know how to express myself. I love the Duke of Hamilton and I can't tell him that I love him, and even if I did tell him, he would take no notice. When he was here, I had a reason for going out, for dressing myself, but now. . . . I used to go out on the terrace in the hopes of seeing him from afar, for at least one second. My God, relieve my anguish; I cannot pray to Thee any longer, hear my prayer. Thy grace is so infinite, Thy pity is so great, Thou hast done so many things for me. It grieves me so not to see his face on the promenade."

Was not the brief association of these two great artists, Marie Bashkirtseff and Guy de Maupassant, the abyss calling to the abyss? Were they not poor, doomed ones, like two ships that pass in the night, each to its separate wreck?

## CHAPTER XXIV

Maupassant and His Publisher—Maupassant's Earnings—  
Badly Underpaid—A Pathetic Rencontre—An Attack on  
Maupassant—Maupassant as a Duellist—A deadly Shot—  
Prevents a Duel—Scaring a Matamore—Maupassant's  
Tour in Italy—Pleased With Nothing—Second Visit—  
Maupassant's Hours of Work—Is Invited to the Quirinal  
—A Visit to England—Maupassant and the Theatre.

“**Y**OU bully me for your account with unheard-of cruelty. You knew to within a few hundred francs how much it was, and when we last met I told you that the money was at your disposal. You can't, really, recriminate, with justice, against a poor publisher, who opens his cash-box to you.”

Thus, on Jan. 14th, 1885, wrote Victor Havard to Maupassant. He goes on to report on his edition of *Des Vers*, which Maupassant had taken away from Charpentier. The report was not a glowing one. He says :

“With regard to the volume *Des Vers*, I haven't put down any figures. I want to talk with you first. I haven't pulled off much of a *coup* with this book so far. It's obvious that my edition has had to suffer by the competition from the other publisher. I have spent nearly 5000 francs for manufacturing this book and 2000 francs in advertising it and I am very far from having got my expenses back as yet. I think you would do well to meet me in this matter and to help me a little to stand up against this facer. As it is usual to give the author 10% on *éditions de luxe*, I suggest paying you 75 centimes for each volume sold. I think that's reasonable enough.”

Maupassant having, as he wrote to Marie, no other purpose in plying his craft than to make as much

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

money as he could, certainly "bullied" Havard to extract his dues, often before they actually became that. In the letters to Maupassant from this publisher, there are frequent references to bills of exchange—usually for such moderate amounts as £40 or £80—drawn on him. Maupassant, who had a good balance at his bank and was drawing regular sums from various papers, can have had no need to draw on his publisher, and his motive obviously was to get hold of what was coming to him as fast as possible, leaving as little cash as possible, due to him, in Havard's hands. He was Norman in this respect, he loved to *gagner*. In his hey-day he may well have been earning over £4000 a year. He was said to have a regular income of 28,000 francs coming in from royalties on his books. He was getting about £40 a week from the papers for the serial use of his short stories and chroniques or articles and for his *serial* stories, in which form all his novels first appeared, and he was being paid at the rate of 10d. a line. The poor man considered himself very highly remunerated and used to boast of his rates. On the day on which he wrote *Mouche* at the Villa Mutterse, which it took him just three hours to perform, he came downstairs, "radiant," says his mother, "and exclaimed: 'I have just earned 500 francs.'" Twenty pounds for a Maupassant short story! Even in those days this was far below the market value of the manuscript, and when one considers the rates that even mediocre short-story writers earn to-day one realizes how he deluded him-

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

self. Thirty pounds is quite an ordinary fee to be paid to-day by a London magazine for "the English end" of a short story published in America, for which the author receives from the American publisher from \$250 to \$500. Fanny Hurst, for instance, whose name, as a writer, is unworthy of mention in the same book as that of Maupassant, never receives less than \$1000 for a story much shorter than *Mouche*. Twenty pounds! Can one imagine the face of Sir Hall Caine, for instance, if such a fee should be offered him by some hardy agent for the Fiji Islands Broadcasting Rights of one instalment of his forthcoming *Life of Christ*? Yet poor Maupassant was proud of the sum, and one of the most pathetic glimpses of him is that given by Maurice Talmeyr one evening when he came to the office of the *Gil Blas* to collect his fee for a short story that had been published in that paper. In Paris contributors are not paid through the post. They call at the cash-desk and get their "lineage," like liners in Fleet Street, and here also the "star" writers come for their honoraria fixed by special contract. "I hadn't seen Maupassant," writes Talmeyr, "for several months—this was in 1891—and I did not recognise him. It was he who now was a skeleton, a skeleton in all its hideous fleshlessness. Bloodless and ashen, with a head no bigger than a fist, with hollow eyes that seemed filled with a dead despair, he was at the same time covered with diamonds and jewels, with an extraordinary and studied elegance in his linen and in his clothes. I fancy he was wearing

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

a white satin waistcoat, which hung loosely over his poor, wasted frame. The paper had made a point of publishing a last short story by him. The price fixed on was five hundred francs (£20) and he had come to take his money. He walked up to the cashier's desk and gave his name, signed the receipt for the money with an emaciated and tremulous hand and feverishly picked up the banknote. Then, turning towards those who were present, he raised the banknote up in the air, held it there for a moment so as to let everybody have a good look at it and with the other hand gave it two or three fillips to make the paper crackle, cast a circular glance round the room with a dull, cavernous eye and went out without saluting anybody."

The poor man wanted to show that, broken as he was, he was still able to command the price which he considered the palpable evidence of his mastery.

It was about this time that there appeared in Paris, from the pen of Boyer d'Agen, a journalist of standing, an article on Guy de Maupassant, which confirms the exactitude of the lugubrious picture given of him in those last days. The gist of d'Agen's article is that Maupassant was a nobleman who had been forced into writing by the need for money, and who had employed his pen, which should have been engaged "in the salons of the Louvre or of Versailles, in the production, over a life-time, of one masterpiece of one hundred pages, which till death came one read and read over and over again to exquisite princesses, who, having inspired him once without remorse, listened to

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

him a thousand times without fatigue." "Bel-Homme" (is this a suggestion that he was a sort of Bel-Ami?) is represented as bemoaning his life-work as he reviews his books and his early decision to revenge himself—gentleman of letters—on the nobility from which he sprang by becoming the biographer of the vilest classes. He is depicted as rising one morning from the side of his latest "*typesse*" and going out on to his balcony to look at Paris, "with arms aching from resting on the marble tables of midnight beerhouses where he had been making observations, with his noble eyes of gentilhomme bleary with unwholesome draughts of beer, from the midnight lamps, from late-walking in the depths of the immense city, with a rag-picker's hook on his shoulder." The picture suggested reminds one of the one that Talmeyr drew that same year.

Maupassant must indeed have been in a broken-down condition to allow such things to be written about him. In former days the writer would have been swiftly called to account. Maupassant, though there was never made public any record of a duel fought by him, was known to be such a master in the use of arms, and notably of duelling pistols, that people invariably fought shy of giving him offense or, if involved in a quarrel with him, managed to get off it without an encounter. His immunity at the hands of numerous husbands had no other explanation. There is only reference to one abortive duel in his valet's memoirs, but it is eloquent enough :

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

"One evening (in June, 1888), whilst dressing for dinner, my master told me that he was going to fight a duel next day; he seemed as calm as usual, but showed himself determined to chastise the ill-bred fellow, who, he said, 'had allowed himself to compromise a married woman in a newspaper article.'

" 'Let them say what they like about my literary work,' he declared, 'but don't let them touch on my private life, for I'll pull them up. And, as I am the offended party, I am demanding a pistol duel at twenty paces, the shooting to go on until one of the adversaries is *hors de combat*. And I can assure you that, with a decent pistol, I shall very soon have caressed my opponent's skin. This afternoon, I went to Gastine Renette's shooting-gallery. Out of seventeen shot that I fired, sixteen hit the dummy in the navel, and the attendant then said to me: "Monsieur, you are getting your hand in for a duel, but that is quite unnecessary. When a man has your skill, and if you have a good weapon, I'm sorry for the man who has to stand opposite you."'

"My master returned home at 11 o'clock. Though he hadn't told me to do so, I was waiting up for him, hoping the duel would come to nothing. When he saw me in the dining-room, he said: 'Oh, there you are. Well, you can go to bed. The matter has been settled. I am not going to fight.'"

Elsewhere François describes Maupassant shooting down at Etretat. His aim was deadly. On one occasion he brought down a leaf, which he had pointed out as his target, on a tree twenty-eight paces away. This notorious skill saved him many a duel. Those he did fight were never reported, for one of his stipulations in accepting a cartel always was that nothing should be sent to the papers. This is an excellent way in Paris to avoid these expensive and tedious affairs.

In his story, *Un Lâche*—one of his best—he analyses the feelings of a man who is to fight a pistol duel and whom terror drives to suicide. He develops the



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

same theme, with a different ending, in Duroy's *veillé d'armes* in *Bel-Ami*. It is certain the fear thus depicted never troubled him himself. His fears were all of imaginary horrors.

Generally speaking, he did not approve of duelling and on one occasion saved a friend from such an encounter in an amusing way. Henri Gervex had had a quarrel with the Baron de Vaux, and the latter—he was on the staff of *Gil Blas*—who was the offended party and who knew Gervex—the painter—to be a good swordsman, had announced his intention of calling him out for a pistol duel. This reached Maupassant's ears. He was fond of Gervex, with whom he had travelled in Italy and who had done a pastel of him, and he didn't want him to get hurt or killed. So he hurried off to Gastine Renette's shooting-gallery and spent the morning in firing at a number of cartons (target-cards) in the rifle-range, scoring bull's-eye after bull's-eye. Then he brought these cartons home and laid them out casually on a table in his smoking-room. Baron de Vaux came to lunch with him that day and—well, let Gervex tell the rest :

"After luncheon, the two went into the smoking-room. Suddenly Vaux gives a cry of admiration.

" 'Oh, *mon cher*,' he cries, 'in the matter of cartons, these are cartons, if you like. Six shots in each black, not a single miss. Gad, what a shot you are! I shouldn't care to have to stand up to your fire.'

" 'But,' said Maupassant, 'those aren't cartons I fired at.'

" 'Whose, then?'

" 'Oh, those were fired by Henri Gervex. He shoots at Gastine's every morning.'

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

"The author of *Bel-Ami* saw the unfortunate Baron de Vaux change colour from crimson to white, and allow his cigar to go out, so strong was his emotion."

. This duel never came off in consequence. The tears used to come into Maupassant's eyes from laughing when he told people how he scared Vaux out of his bellicose mood.

Gervex first met Maupassant at the Café de la Rochefoucauld in Paris. It was after the great success of *Les Soirées de Médan*. In those days Maupassant seemed to be a frequenter of this café, he who afterwards expressed such a dislike for these public houses of call. Maupassant paid his first visit to Italy in Gervex's company and may have been an amusing fellow-traveller, but was certainly not an edifying one. Gervex says he came to Italy with his mind made up to abuse everything. Gervex thinks it may have been in his pose as a realist, as he then was. "All through our tour he never once stopped 'grousing,' and when we visited museums he used to pretend to admire mediocre works of art, while 'slating' what is universally admired, just for the sake of 'taking a rise' out of me. In Venice he was furious about the dirtiness of the town and the stink of the canals. He would say for instance: 'The moment you move an oar, the smell is awful,' or 'Why does one come into Venice by way of the sewers?' Rome, according to his expression, 'stunk of bric-à-brac,' and he was furious about the 'old rubbish.' He told Count Primoli that what was best in Rome in the artistic

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

line was Pope Urbain's portrait of Velasquez. Even St. Peter's did not escape his criticism. 'The holy-water font,' he said, 'is so large that one could take a bath in it.' " And when they came to the Forum he went into convulsions of laughter at the smallness of that famous place.

His second visit to Italy was undertaken towards the end of 1889, on board the *Bel-Ami*. François accompanied him and has some interesting details of the journey in his *Souvenirs*. According to the valet, Maupassant wrote a long book about this journey—a book of 220 pages. François gives a synopsis of its contents and describes his distress when one morning on entering the study he saw in the fireplace the charred remains of "what was without any doubt the manuscript of the book about Italy." Maupassant told him that he had destroyed it out of hatred for Signor Crispi. There are certain pages about Italy in *La Vie Errante*, which, according to François, were all that was saved from the holocaust. There can be not doubt that these were all that Maupassant ever wrote, that the long manuscript never existed and that here once more the excellent François's "leg was being pulled." The best proof of this is that the "manuscript" was supposed to have been produced between Maupassant's return from Italy on October 31st and November 26th, a manuscript of 220 pages. Maupassant's usual output rarely exceeded six pages a day and, according to Henri Gervex, who stayed on long visits with him at the Villa Muterse in Antibes,

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

when he was writing *Bel-Ami*, his whole day's work—he only worked in the mornings up to luncheon—was always limited to two pages of manuscript on sermon-paper size. Gervex says :

“ At that time he was composing *Bel-Ami*, about which he often spoke to us, and, every day, we were able to see the two pages of manuscript—two, not one more, not one less—which he had produced in the course of the morning. These pages were absolutely free of all corrections. And this perfect mechanism operated without a single interruption, without any hesitation whatever.”

Lumbroso states in his book that Maupassant's working hours were regularly from seven in the morning till midday and that his usual output was six pages. This would be for stories which he had long carried about in his head and which, so to speak, needed only writing down, copying from the tablets of memory. For instance, *Mouche* was written right off in three hours.

These facts prove that the 220 page manuscript on Italy, supposed to have been written in three or four weeks, at a time when he was otherwise greatly occupied, never existed except in his conversations with the ingenuous François. And it was certainly not Maupassant who would have destroyed “ copy ” which would have been worth at least 5000 francs because he objected to the policy of Signor Crispi. For the rest he must have had affection for the “ *bel paese dove il si suona*,” for one of his best friends, Count Primoli, lived there and he himself was at Rome so *gratissima a persona* that in November, 1889, the lovely Mar-

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

gherita of Savoy, Queen of Italy, wrote to ask him to come to Rome as the guest of the King and of herself. Maupassant was delighted at the honour thus paid him, and seemed very pleased at the prospect of seeing these sovereigns in their home-life. He added, however, that he hoped "these people" had sensible modern ideas about baths and daily ablutions, as in the contrary case he could not enjoy his visit at all.

This reminds one of those who used to dread "commands" to Windsor, because of the relentless rule against smoking in any part of the palace, and was not more captious.

On one of the very rare occasions on which Maupassant granted an "interview" and spoke of his life and methods of work—it was in 1885—he declared that, apart from his morning's work, he invariably spent the hours from four till seven in the afternoon at his writing-table. From the same interview may be taken a passage, which refutes a very common slander about him, a passage which is fully confirmed in his book by François, his *officier de bouche*. Maupassant had been contradicting a number of stories about him and added :

"It has also been said—the story was started last year and has grown to gigantic proportions—that I have been shut up as a madman as a result of alcoholic excesses. And I never drink, never drink anything; neither wine, nor liqueurs, nor beer, nor even water tinged with wine. Nothing either during or between my meals but St. Galmier water."

Maupassant told the same interviewer that his eyes

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

gave him so much trouble that he could read none of the many books which the authors sent him, a fact that he regretted. These books he used to lend out to friends. Here Maupassant differed from Anatole France, who never even opened the parcels that arrived at his house from all over the world. These were thrown into the bath in his apartment as, being used for no other purpose, a convenient receptacle.

On the same occasion, Maupassant spoke of his illness and said: "I have been ill since four years ago. I am suffering from a nervous malady which I shall only get rid of by taking great care of myself. I strictly obey the orders of the princes of medical science, with a punctuality which is only equalled by my perfect scepticism."

Maupassant's attitude during his first visit to Italy seems to have been his usual one when visiting a country for the first time. In 1886, he paid a return visit to the English baron who had stayed with him at Etretat, and seems to have been grumbling the whole time. Oscar Wilde published an account of this journey, from the pen of Blanche Roosevelt in the *Woman's World*, which he was then editing.\*

After spending a few days at his friend's house in Hampshire, Maupassant went up to London, but re-

\* It was Oscar Wilde who first sent the news, that Maupassant's case was considered hopeless by Dr Blanche, to England. It is conveyed in a letter which he wrote in 1893 to Lady Dorothy Neville, which has been published. He had had the information the same day from a friend of Maupassant's, who had that morning met the doctor on the boulevards. At that time it was generally thought that Maupassant was going to recover.

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

fused to go out and see the sights. It may be said that the weather was shocking, even for England. From his hotel in London, he went up to Oxford, because Bourget had impressed on him that he must not fail to visit "the only mediæval city that exists in the world." At Oxford it was pouring with rain. It was shockingly cold. The party put up for luncheon at the Mitre, and Maupassant refused to budge from the hostelry until after this meal. "Antiquities," he said, when he was urged to make use of the morning for a tour of inspection, "are all very well, but first of all *le déjeuner*. *Le déjeuner* is the most important." After luncheon, in which the Mitre manciple excelled himself, a four-wheeler was chartered and a drive round Oxford was begun. It was raining cats and dogs, or "*curés*," as Maupassant said. The driver was drunk and blasphemous. "This 'ere's the b-b-b——Sheldonian, hic," is one of the phrases of his Oxford cicerone that Maupassant remembered and used to quote. "We viewed Oxford as from the bottom of an aquarium," wrote Blanche Roosevelt. From the station a sarcastic telegram was despatched to Paul Bourget, and Maupassant returned to London and spent the evening—he returned to Paris next morning—at the Savoy Theatre. This was one of the very rare occasions on which he ever sat out a piece at any theatre. "I hate theatres almost as much as I hate the Academy," he once said, "and I never go there except during the *entr'actes*. Stay, I ought to admit that I am rather fond of the circus with its clowns and its

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

horsewomen. But I don't compare it with fairy-pieces, pantomimes and Punch and Judy shows. I adore Punch and Judy shows and often stop and look on. This kind of show has for me the enormous advantage that one doesn't hear any literature there and that one may consider it as a recreation, as a pleasure to the eyes."

An English writer who lived in Paris during the ten years of Maupassant's literary life there, records that, having during that period attended practically every dress rehearsal and first night of any importance at the theatres, he never once saw Maupassant there or heard of his presence. His commercial success as a dramatist might possibly have been attained had he pursued a different line of conduct. But he hated crowds and the odour of humanity.

No sooner had he reached his flat on his return from England than he demanded his bath.

"I must take a bath at once," he said. "You can't imagine how tired I am, with pains all over my body. I don't feel myself; those devils of Englishmen, that so-called high society, have put me into an unbelievable state, so boring are they and so irritating with their conceitedness and their idiocy. Good Lord! what unbearable people. So I cut my visit short and only stayed eight days over there, and take my word for it that if I hadn't found in that dull country a Flemish woman from Ghent, with ardent blood in her, who had a superb profile and a neck and shoulders, oh, what a neck and shoulders she had—they were of marble and such as I am sure Van Dyck, their (*sic*) great painter, never came across in the whole of his long career—if I hadn't fallen in with this beauty, as I say, I should have come back in forty-eight hours."

Maupassant, who loved chatting with his servants



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

and encouraged them to familiarity, must have felt lost with the "well-trained" English servants in a nobleman's house. On the whole it is as well he did not prolong his stay there, for with his habits and processes towards women, he might quite innocently have got himself into some terrible coil. Supposing he had had an outburst in England such as he had later on at the hostelry on Ste. Margu rite's Island at Cannes, where two lady-friends of his, whom he had invited there on Christmas Day, 1891, were so indignant at his conduct that they left at once for Paris and never afterwards gave any signs of life to any of the Maupassant family! It was the first violent outbreak of the madness that a week later overthrew his reason. It might just as well have broken out in England, and one can imagine the sequel at Winchester Assizes, with "poor Guy" listening while an English judge explains to the Hampshire jury the ferocious English law on responsibility.

## CHAPTER XXV

Havard and *Mont-Oriol*—An Enthusiastic Letter—Where  
• Maupassant Got His Stories—Maupassant Plagiarized—  
Victim of American Pirates—His Curious Life at Riom—  
His Apprehensions of Death—A Confession of Insincerity  
—Maupassant's Love-Letters—How His Marriage Fell  
Through.

**I**N describing how he employed his time every day, Maupassant told the interviewer, from whose reports extracts have been quoted, that his afternoons were usually spent at the offices of his publishers, Havard and Ollendorff; "both of them friends of mine," he added. This shows him so keenly interested in the commercial success of his books that he could barely let a day go by without informing himself as to the number of copies that had been sold during the previous twenty-four hours. It would be interesting to know what the publishers really thought of these visits and this inquisitiveness. An author of minor importance would no doubt have been told of their undesirability, but to Jove is allowed what to the ox is forbidden. Possibly Victor Havard really liked Maupassant's constant calls, because he was, or declared himself to be, an enthusiastic admirer as well as the devoted friend of "his dear author." Here, for instance is the letter he wrote to Maupassant after reading *Mont-Oriol*, which he published in 1887 :

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

" Paris, December 10th, 1886.

" My dear Friend,

" This time, I made use of extreme stubbornness and strength of mind not to touch *Mont-Oriol* before it was completely set up in type. I wanted to feel the impression it produces upon one in one go, without spoiling this impression by reading the book by fits and starts. So the other night, I read it all right off at a single sitting, and I am still flabbergasted, dumb-founded, so strongly, so strongly did the book move my soul and shake it. All my poor being is still distraught thereby. Never has any author, either amongst the great dead, the classics, or the great living entered into my soul as you have done; not even Victor Hugo, who, after all, has sublime flights, but who does not produce the same feeling of real life that you do. It is especially your excursions into the world beyond that have stupefied me.

" And shall I confess, dear illustrious sceptic, whose scepticism is only skin-deep? Well, I wept at the end of the book, and all those who were with me at the time did the same; and we brutes of petty bourgeois, in spite of your cruel irony and perpetual chaff about us, we don't blush to confess it.

" In conclusion, and without troubling about what posterity will say, I declare that this book is a sublime and unperishable masterpiece. It is Maupassant in all the expansion and plenitude of his genius and the full maturity of his marvellous talent. In this book you strike, with unheard-of power, a new note, a note I had fathomed in you ages ago. I had foreseen these accents of supreme tenderness and emotion in *Au Printemps*, *Miss Harriet*, *Yvette* and elsewhere.

" I find this book admirably orchestrated, with extraordinary measure and sureness of touch. . . . To sum up: this book ought to get you from twenty to twenty-five thousand new readers, for it is accessible to the most timid minds of the *bourgeoisie* whom your first productions scarced persistently.

" Receive therefore, my dear, illustrious author and friend, the expression of my most profound and altogether limitless admiration.

" VICTOR HAVARD."

Havard's letters to Maupassant have been published by Baron Lombroso. Apart from the intrinsic inter-

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

est of their record of the sales of the different works, they throw a light on some of the processes of publishing in France. Maupassant's editions consisted of 500 copies and several editions were printed at once. In a letter which Havard wrote on April 4th, after the publication of *Mont-Oriol*, he says :

"I had hoped that the last set of reviews would have given a vigorous push to the sales of *Mont-Oriol*, and instead of that I am feeling a real disappointment; for sales have fallen off considerably since I last wrote you. We have only sold the 25th and 39th editions, and in the last few days we have broken into the 26th edition for the provinces and into the 38th for Paris. Besides this there are nine complete editions in the hands of Testard, the stitcher. . . . Your other books are beginning to move a little; we are selling the 51st edition of *Bel-Ami*. I have printed 2000 copies of the *Contes de la Bécasse* (11th to 14th editions)."

What may have affected the sales of Maupassant's books in 1887 is that that year he had published his story *Le Horla*, a *conte fantastique* about a man persecuted by a supernatural being, that had made everybody say that Maupassant had gone out of his mind and in consequence scared purchasers of books. When these reports reached the ears of George de Porto-Riche, he said: "Well, if the *Horla* story shows a man to be cracked, I'm afraid I'm in for it, as it was I who gave Guy the whole story."

Many, indeed most of Maupassant's stories were based on anecdotes told him by friends. Pinchon supplied him with a number of his Normandy tales. Lapierre was another contributor to his storehouse, and many other of his friends. *Fort Comme La Mort*

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

came to Maupassant, through Madame Lecomte de Nouy, from Bourget, who afterwards handled the same subject in his novel *Le Fantôme*. There was some trouble about this, Bourget being quite wrongly charged with having borrowed Maupassant's idea. The story turns on the passion conceived by a man for the daughter of the mature married woman of high society, who has been his mistress for years. Both Bourget and Maupassant invite sympathy with the victim of this tragic love, the victim being the elderly lover. The idea is a very old one and long before Bourget evolved it, it had been embodied in a ribald and bawdy French song beginning :

“ Oh, la mère est belle  
Et la fille est encore mieux,” etc.

Apart from his friends, Maupassant used to be supplied with stories by peasants, gamekeepers, postmen, rural constables, innkeepers and so on, all over Normandy. “ Anything new, Father So-and-So? ” he would ask. Any little village happening or scandal or joke was welcome, and whether likely to be available or not was always remunerated with four or five francs.

On one occasion one of his “ beaters ” told him a story about how a murder was discovered because a man was heard singing a song, the text of which had been seen on a printed scrap of newspaper which had formed part of the wad in the gun from which the fatal shot had been fired. Thus the culprit was traced

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

after years of mystery. Maupassant, who must just then have been hard up for a subject, used this story, and a few days later the editor of the paper in which it appeared received a letter asking him not to dish up old yarns like this one, the original of which could be found in such and such a collection of tales. Like the story of *L'Inutile Beauté*,\* it had been passed on as original by his informant, who probably had heard it in the same way as something that had really happened. Maupassant never plagiarized. Zola influenced him in one or two stories, as in the *Papa à Simon*, and in *Bel-Ami* there are one or two incidents which were inspired by Flaubert, as the rendezvous of George and Madame Walter in the church and the use of a cab for gallantry. On the other hand Maupassant has been shamelessly pillaged all over the world. Baron Lumbroso, for instance, gives in his book a chapter of twenty-two pages, entitled "*Maupassant et les Plagiats de G. d'Annunzio*," which is almost entirely made up of parallel columns in which the quotations from the works of the Prince di Montenevoso read almost like so many translations from the parallel passages from Maupassant. The latter seems to have made no protest, and indeed his attitude throughout his career towards his plunderers was one of contemptuous indifference. However, only a few weeks before his reason finally broke down, he displayed great indignation against some American newspaper publishers who had worked up one of his

\* Originally told by James Boswell.

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

stories into a serial story of over two hundred pages which they had published as from his pen. He put the matter into the hands of Jacob, the fighting *avoué*. His letter, dated November 5th, 1891, from the rue Boccador, is extant. He wants Jacob to see that these publishers get sent to prison for what he describes as "swindling, pure and simple, theft and forgery." The letter is an angry one. It has been pointed to by people who have written about poor Guy from the medical point of view as a proof that he was mad at the time—a month before he actually did go mad. If it is a sign of madness for an author to write an angry letter because impudent thieves pick his brains and make fraudulent use of his name, a very great number of men of letters might be sent to Bedlam. There is no proof of *folie de la persecution* here, nor was it megalomania for the poor, dear fellow to refer to the fact that he had recently scored off the *Figaro*, that he had written over 300 *contes et nouvelles* and that he was paid as much as £20 for the least of his stories. Megalomania in Guy de Maupassant to boast of getting £20 for a Maupassant short story! Bon Dieu!

The only possible indication of an unsound reason in the writer of this letter is the suggestion that the American courts would send an American newspaper publisher to prison for what may morally have been piracy, but in those days was considered quite legitimate, literary "go-getting."

All his letters on this American business as well as

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

his correspondence on the publication of his portrait in a new edition of *Les Soirées de Médan* showed great irritability, but a man can be irritable without being mad. Alas! there were other signs of what was so very soon to become manifest.

The pirated story was *Le Testament* from *Les Contes de la Bécasse*. By her will a woman declares a certain man, who, with the woman's husband and son, is present at the reading of the testament, to have been her year-long deeply-cherished lover and to be the father of her son. She leaves him the whole of her fortune. It is a powerful, dramatic story, about which one feels as one does about most of Maupassant's stories, that it is taken from life. The Americans had turned this into a long novel, and had published it as written for them under contract by Maupassant. Enough to make any author vexed! Some American "counsellor" had offered Jacob to take the case up "on spec." for twenty per cent. of the net proceeds recovered as damages. However, in a second letter he demanded a sum in advance, which Maupassant describes in a letter dated Dec. 5th, as "enormous," and as to which he says, "that after all the catastrophes I have had with my family, I am totally unable to find such an amount." He asks Jacob if he cannot withdraw "from the prosecution," as though the American counsellor had moved a finger in the matter, before "handling that French writing guy's mazuma."

It is possible the annoyance over this matter may



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

have precipitated the outbreak four weeks later, but that is the only connection it has with his insanity.

*Mont-Oriol*, about which Havard was so enthusiastic as a reader and so disappointed as a publisher, was written under circumstances which are the best proof that Maupassant's life affords of the fact that both physically and mentally he was one of the most robust men of his time. They further establish that a man who could produce so fine a book while leading so exhausting a life could make any and every demand not only on his body but on his brain. That kind of life often lands a man in a little bathchair when he is old and also produces softening of the brain. In what Maupassant died of there was no softening of the brain. He died at an age when a man of his physique, leading a temperate, busy, open-air life, most of it in the country or on the sea, could have "carried on," even in the Riom fashion, for at least another couple of decades. It was the Hidden Evil that caused all the mischief, and no doubt that in the course of his frequentation of loose women of the professional class he may have re-infected himself several times.

He was taking the waters at Châtel-Guyon in August, 1885, and his father was with him. Gustave de Maupassant was painting "bad pictures" and accompanying his son on daily sprees. Maupassant had *two* mistresses with him, young women. One was "tall, dark, distinguished," the other was "fair, full of fun, a Parisian gavroche type." Maupassant lived

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

with these two "*moukères*" (as he called them, in remembrance of his journey in Africa) in a cottage in the park of a friend of his. The friend's mother, by the way, was a good deal upset at, and not a little shocked by, the way the two *moukères* used to behave in the avenues of the park. However, she fed the trio, sending Maupassant's and his women's meals down to the "*pavillon*" by a footman. At this time Maupassant was working "from morning till night, and often late into the night," up in a garret-study, to which he used to climb up a ladder. Maupassant returned to Riom (in Auvergne) in January, 1886, and used to take his meals at the Café du Dôme in company with one of the ladies. The other one had left the district.

Monsieur G. de Lacaze-Duthiers, the latest biographer of Maupassant, is responsible for the following statement, which he makes in an article entitled *Guy de Maupassant en Auvergne*, which appeared in October 1921 in the magazine called *La Mouette* :

"One of the amusements of the author of *Bel-Ami*, while on his visit to Riom, was to take his female companion to the rue Neuve, where there was a hospitable house, which no doubt is still standing. It was a sort of Maison Tellier, home-like in appearance, the entrance hall of which was used during the summer as parlour, kitchen and dining-room. Many mugs of beer were drunk there and Maupassant, who had become much quieter, used to send his woman upstairs. . . ."

The sequel may be read in *La Mouette*. The writer's comment on this contribution he makes to Maupassant's biography is :

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

"These details neither add to nor detract from Maupassant's glory. If I have revealed them to the readers of *La Mouette*, it is certainly not from a love of scandal, such as some critics love. I simply wanted to show the independence of a man who hated hypocrisy and had no prejudices of any sort."

It was while studying in this way *de visu* the morals of the kind of women he has described in *La Femme de Paul* (one of the very few stories in which he deals with sexual abnormalities) that he wrote, in the album of a prominent citizen of Riom, a barrister, a page of reflections which fill his biographer with enthusiastic admiration. He compares the gradual decay of the human body to an old house falling to pieces. It is possible he may have had in his subconscious mind that very fine passage in Sallust, where a similar comparison is made between the Roman Empire and a building going to ruin. Maupassant's page ends with the sentence :

"Happy those who do not wait for the end of this long and hideous work of the years, but who go to meet HER " (*la mort*) "with a rifle on their arms, a thought in their heads, a love in their hearts."

The extreme depression suggested by this page in the album, this morbid anticipation of death, are not at all proofs of the black melancholy which writers on Maupassant declare was a permanent factor in his mental composition. In this case it was nothing but the natural reaction from the unholy debauches which Lacaze-Duthiers describes. The reaction from a mental debauch is just as terrible as that from bodily excesses. There is Katzenjammer for the former

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

also. It would last with Maupassant just as long as it usually lasts with men of robust physique. Black melancholy, such as might seem constitutional, beset him only when alarm took him about the Hidden Evil. This was not the case at Riom, for otherwise he, who was so careful of his health and who so obediently followed doctor's orders, would not have been seen "emptying mugs of beer" in a lupanar. He was probably then under the illusion that he was cured. There was no Wassermann in those days to demonstrate the contrary. The disease gives long periods of quiescence which sometimes extend to over twenty years and its victims often lull themselves into a sense of false security. Therefore Maupassant's pessimism, as displayed on the page of the Riom album, was no more sincere than much of what he wrote. It was literature, nothing more.

On one occasion, in conversation about this very book, *Mont-Oriol*, he admitted how far he was from feeling the sentiments he expressed in language which Zola described "as glittering as gold, as pure as diamonds." He was talking with Madame Lecomte de Nouy, and said: "In the manuscript of *Mont-Oriol*, the sentimental chapters are much fuller of corrections than the others. All the same it's coming along. One can get into the way of anything, my dear, with patience, but I often laugh at the sentimental, the very sentimental and tender thoughts that I evolve, that I find after a great deal of seeking. I am frightened that this may convert me to the genre

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

amoureux, not only in my books but in my life. When one's mind takes a bent, it usually keeps to it; and it's a fact that often when I am wandering about on the Cap d'Antibes headland, preparing a poetical chapter under the moonlight, I find myself thinking that those kinds of stories are not as stupid as one might think."

Speaking with the same woman he again declared that he had never been in love with any of the many women with whom he had had "affaires." "These women," writes Madame de Nouy, "whose slave he seemed to be, did not stand as high in his thoughts as they may have imagined. He was never the dupe of anything. When I asked him how then, having fathomed their paltry feelings, the meanness of their souls, he could possibly love them, he answered:

"I don't love them, but they amuse me. I find it great fun (*très farce*) to make them think that I am under their charm . . . and you ought to see what pains they take to keep me there by varying their effects. There is one of them who won't eat anything in my presence except rose-petals." And this with a low laugh, "one of those mocking laughs which reveal a whole mental condition."

Accordingly the beautiful love-letters that Maupassant wrote in such numbers—he had an extraordinary gift for inventing terms of endearment—were insincere, but none the less works of art. This was probably the reason why they are so much superior to the sincere love-letters, even of gifted writers.



SCENES AT ANTIBES : (1) AND (2) VIEWS FROM MAUPASSANT'S HOUSE ;  
(3) THE HEADLAND AT CAP D'ANTIBES, WHERE HE USED TO THINK OUT  
LOVE-PASSAGES AS DESCRIBED TO MADAME DE NOUY.



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

Many of these letters were used by Madame Lecomte de Nouy in her famous book, *Amitié Amoureuse*, the hero of which, Philippe, is now admitted to have been drawn from Guy de Maupassant. The book is dedicated to Madame de Maupassant, who was so indignant at the use made of her son's name and correspondence that she broke off all intercourse with the authoress, who had been one of her intimate friends. *Amitié Amoureuse* was first published in October, 1896, three years after "Philippe's" death, and is now (because of "Philippe's" identity) in its 251st edition.

Remembering Maupassant's declaration as to his love-letters, it is not in *Amitié Amoureuse* and similar works that he should be studied as a lover. Probably under his cynicism was concealed the despairing knowledge that, infected as he was, he was forever excluded from contemplating even a lasting connection, such as marriage involves, with any decent woman.\* Otherwise, there was perhaps nobody in the Paris of his day

\* During a visit to Switzerland in 1888, Maupassant made a statement to the effect that many years previously he had visited the same region and that he had narrowly missed getting engaged to be married then. This must have been before he was certain of the real nature of his illness. "It was indeed here," he said, "that Madame Fate decided what my life was to be and made a bachelor of me. I was on an excursion with a whole family, and she who ought to have been my wife was amongst the tourists. Another woman, who was practically a stranger to us, joined our party; I don't know why nor under what circumstances. She slipped in amongst us. This was the death of our projected union. . . . For unfortunately it is almost always so in this wretched life of ours, the honest woman is often the dupe of the adventuress. . . . I sometimes ask myself whether this marriage would not have been happiness for me, for I knew this young woman very well, she was brilliantly clever, she was broad-minded and generous and very well educated. Life would have been pleasant to me at her side, she had everything that was wanted to help me on in my work. . . . But, fate. . . ."



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

more fitted for the part of husband and father. He was of a deeply affectionate nature and loved his family. He had no true aversion from marriage as an estate, and proved this by facilitating, at great cost to himself, the marriage and settlement of his brother Hervé, whose little daughter was worshipped by him and made his heiress. It was the cruellest fate that a mischance as a young man should have made him a pariah, closing and barring in his face the gates through which most men are supposed to go to what real happiness this life is said to afford.

## CHAPTER XXVI

Maupassant and his Brother—His Visit to Hervé's Grave—  
• Maupassant as a Practical Joker—An Article in "The Cornhill"—How "Sigma's" Leg was Pulled—Frogs and Jacks-in-the-Box—The Marquise and the Message—Maupassant's Change of Methods—Reduced Resources—Maupassant and the University—"Most Unfortunate of Men."

• **A**FTER Doctor Meuriot, one of the physicians attached to Doctor Blanche's establishment at Passy, had examined Guy de Maupassant on his arrival there from Cannes in the early part of January, 1892, he declared that the unfortunate man had doubtlessly been insane for fully two years. This seems to indicate that the grief occasioned to him by, and the alarm for himself that he felt at, the illness and death in a private asylum, of his deeply-beloved brother Hervé was the final blow that struck his reason from its throne. Madame de Maupassant always maintained that it was in certain passages of *Sur l'Eau* that she first saw signs of Guy's madness, and Edouard Maynial writes "that it was as a consequence of these painful events (Hervé's illness and death) that he wrote certain symptomatic pages of his volume, *Sur l'Eau*." *Sur l'Eau*, however, appeared in 1888—that is to say, more than a year before poor Hervé's decease, and therefore cannot have been influenced by it. There can be no doubt that this catastrophe—as Maupassant himself called it—made

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

a most disastrous impression on him. He frequently referred to his brother's illness and expressed the fear that he would go the same way. However, it was a convention in the family and amongst friends that the cause of Hervé's illness had been a double sunstroke, to which he had fallen a victim while working in the gardens of the horticultural establishment at Antibes, in which Guy had set him up after his marriage.

This illness, this death affected him so much that when, a year later—namely, in November, 1890—he visited the little village cemetery, about an hour's carriage drive from Lyons, where Hervé was buried, close to the retired house where he had died, Maupassant showed signs of violent emotion. As they stood by the side of the grave, relates François, "Monsieur remained motionless and silent. I made one or two remarks about the beauty of the view from the cemetery, but he did not seem to hear me. His face had assumed that purple hue which in him betrays that he is labouring under some violent emotion. He does not cry, but his face is all screwed up, and this silent anguish, without a sob, oppresses my heart."

On this occasion Maupassant spoke of his brother's death, and his words reveal the true man under the boulevard veneer of cynicism.

"I saw him die," he said. "According to the doctors, the death was expected a day earlier, but Hervé was waiting for me and did not want to go without seeing me once more and saying good-bye. . . . Au revoir, perhaps . . . who knows? When I had

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

embraced him he cried out twice in a loud voice : ' My Guy, my Guy,' as he used to do in the garden at Les Verguies long ago, when he wanted me to come out and play. With my handkerchief I wiped his poor, dim eyes from which all the blue, the pretty blue, had faded. At a gesture he made, I thought he wanted me to lower my hand a little. I did so and he touched it with his lips. . . . Oh, my poor brother, how genuine was his friendship, and oh, how young he was to be taken away from us like that ! ”

• Before all this terrible sadness, and during the periods when the nightmare of the Great Distress left him in peace, Maupassant was, even when verging on middle-age, a man of cheerful, almost boisterous spirits, full of fun. Till the end he loved his *farces*, but his practical jokes were always free from malice; he was far too kindly and generous to wish to cause pain to anyone.

Maupassant being remembered for his *farces* also, a few of the more notable ones may be recorded.

A very good instance of how he enjoyed fooling even a friend and what trouble he would take to effect his purpose, may be found in the August, 1921, number of *The Cornhill Magazine* in an article entitled "Guy de Maupassant : A Recollection." The writer, who signs himself "Sigma," describes a nocturnal excursion he took with Maupassant, under the guidance of a skilled detective, who had been recommended to them by Baron de Rothschild, to visit the arcana of criminal Paris. Maupassant and "Sigma" disguised

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

themselves and "Then de (sic) Maupassant declared we must wash our face and hands in the gutter; I protested, but as he insisted we did so—covered our faces and hands with mud." In this array they visited the two Caveaux at the Halles, the Château Rouge and other nocturnal resorts, ending up with "Père Lunette's," as to which "Sigma" writes: "perhaps the most awful place in those days in Paris, the favourite resort of Lacenaire, the famous assassin, and the rendezvous of the deepest-dyed criminals of the capital, etc., etc." Poor "Sigma," how Maupassant and the "detective" must have been laughing at him up their sleeves. There was not the faintest danger—except perhaps of vermin—at any one of the places mentioned. They might have gone there alone and in ordinary evening dress. Each one of these resorts was a show-place, the habitués, male and female, mere supers. During the 'eighties sightseers used regularly to go and view these places. Père Lunette's, a small two-roomed café in the rue Maubert, was and is visited because of some obscene frescoes in the inner room. Lacenaire—he killed an old woman to rob her—who developed into a murderer from being a petty swindler, certainly never set foot in such a low drinking-shop. He always "kep hisself respectable." The company one saw there were prostitutes, souteneurs, beggars and out-of-works, who were allowed to sit around and who were pointed out to the "poires" (mugs) who visited this place as "dangerous criminals." The poires would *always*

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

stand treat to these "desperate men and women," who would be laughing at them quite as heartily as, for instance, Maupassant, that night must have been laughing at "Sigma." As a Parisian boulevardier and newspaper man nobody would know better than Maupassant, that dangerous criminals do not frequent show-places to be viewed, and that not one of the houses of call that they visited that night was any more dangerous to a customer, perhaps less so, than the haunts of *la haute pégre* (the swell mob), say, the *Café Américain* of those days, or the *Café Sylvain*. "Sigma" reminds one of Tom Pinch being shown London and the haunts of Sweeny Todd, by his friend.

Maupassant liked playing jokes on women. One day he sent a basket of small frogs to a lady. The idea was that she would open the basket in her drawing-room and that the frogs would jump out and scatter all over the apartment. The sensible young woman (who must have had a kind heart) saw what was in the basket, rang for her carriage and took the frogs out to the Bois de Boulogne, where she turned them out into the lake. On another occasion a number of little parcels are delivered during a dinner-party to the several guests, as having been brought by a messenger, who had had instructions from the sender to say that it was urgent the parcels should be opened at once. Each parcel contained a Jack-in-the-box. This *farce* was very successful and the messenger, who was François, was able to report to Maupassant that he had heard shouts of laughter coming from the

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

dining-room. Disguising himself and others was frequently part of a practical joke with Maupassant. François writes of a youth who figured at several dinner-parties and who was a soubrette in travesti, who succeeded in making a fool of more than one woman off whom Maupassant wanted to score. At one of his many *fêtes* down at Etretat—*fêtes champêtres*—he instructed the several members of the village orchestra he had hired, each to play a different tune on his ophicleide during the rendering of one morceau. And so on. All boyish pranks, which would not call for a word of mention did they not help to disprove the report that Maupassant was a despondent pessimist, a hypochondriac. So he was at times, but not constitutionally and only during periods of depression after excess, or when after a long period of quiescence the disease within him gave him cause for alarm.

At one of his *fêtes* at La Guillette, two ladies fainted. Maupassant has them aroused by having firearms discharged close to them. These *fêtes* sometimes took the aspect of village fairs, with jugglers, and leaders of wild beasts, trained monkeys, barrel-organs, tumblers, buffoons and so forth.

Was it as a consequence of some practical joke played on her that one day in May, 1887, a pretty young woman dressed in a grey tailor-made dress and a hat of the same colour drove up to Maupassant's house in Paris in a yellow governess-cart, curtly asked if M. de Maupassant was in, and, being told he was

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

out, demanded pen and ink, pushed her way into his study and on a sheet of sermon-paper that was lying on his desk wrote, in large letters, the single word—

“COCHON”

When Maupassant came in and had read the message, he gave a loud laugh. Then suddenly he cried out: “May the devil take the lot of them.” And he added, speaking to his servant: “This young Marchioness who writes so well is the daughter of a former Minister under the Empire. But I don’t want to see her. . . . I am more than fed up with her. And another thing, François, I’ll tell you straight, I don’t want to stay in Paris any longer. They don’t allow me breathing-time here.”

The young Marchioness’s communication may possibly have been the outcome of a financial disappointment. Maupassant was not exclusively run after for his *beaux yeux*, and in some cases, like other celebrities, was supposed to pay his female admirers for worshipping him. In the matter of venal loves, Maupassant seemed lacking in that generosity and *largesse* which distinguished him in other rôles. He seems to have tariffed—to judge from what he writes over and over again in his stories—the market-price of such favours as low as a single louis.

François gives many instances of his kindness and charity. There was an old beggar-woman down at Etretat who was always able to count on him for ten francs, or a louis.



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

He made a great sacrifice of money to settle Hervé in his gardening establishment. At the same time he was paying his mother's rent down on the Riviera, and besides the allowance he made her was giving his little niece an annuity of twelve hundred francs. And at this time his books were beginning not to be so profitable. The sales further fell off when, under the mistaken notion that it was novels in the tedious, psychological fashion of Paul Bourget that were wanted, he abandoned his early method of disclosing by their actions the mental processes of his characters and went in—in *Fort Comme La Mort* and *Notre Cœur*—for giving long pages of analysis. But he was too perfect an artist ever to become dull, and indeed mixed with its composition sufficient physiology to make his psychology palatable. But at first his readers were scared away. Maupassant seems to have blamed poor Havard and took his publishing away from him and gave both the psychological novels mentioned above, besides *Pierre et Jean*, which is quite one of his best long stories, to Paul Ollendorff. One of Maupassant's grievances against Havard seems to have been that the publisher did not pay over to him at once money received from abroad for foreign translation rights. He annotates a letter of Havard's, dated April 4th, 1887, in which the publisher writes: "I have had requests for leave to translate *Mont-Oriol* and have asked England for £20 and Spain for £12," with the following remarks: "The Spanish business. He (Havard) only paid me in eight instal-

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

ments the sum he had received cash down." The matter of foreign rights was hardly one of sufficient importance for him to quarrel with so devoted a publisher as Havard had shown himself to be. Maupassant did not get market-prices here either. Sums as paltry as £4 for the Hungarian rights of *Bel-Ami* are mentioned in the correspondence.

A good literary agent could have made a really rich man of "poor Guy." As it was when he collapsed, his estate was about the twenty-fifth part of that left by the late Charles Garvice. The commercial value of his copyrights was, after his death, considered of such small value by his family that his sister-in-law offered to abandon them altogether in exchange for a moderate income. Still, since then his books have been selling well and stories of his are constantly being reproduced in the papers. For such reproductions a minimum fee of 2d. a line has to be paid to his executors. In France copyright has a duration of fifty years. It is a curious fact, however, that the cinema people have entirely neglected his works, which should be a veritable mine for "two-reelers."

Other people who have strangely neglected this great writer's works are the compilers and publishers of "readers" for educational establishments. One recalls only one passage that has so been used, and that is an extract from a masterly article he wrote on a visit he paid to the Creusot ironworks. This article appears at the end of the book: *Au Soleil*. This neglect, which proceeds from the fact that the pontiffs

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

of the Paris University—men like Brunetière and Faguet—though in his lifetime and influenced by his tremendous vogue they did swing occasional censers under his nose, took up after his death the attitude of entirely ignoring him and his work, or of ridiculing his claims to mere talent. Brunetière doesn't say a word about him in his manual, while Emile Faguet, the critic who announced that, after writing the Rougon-Macquart series, Zola "lost every kind of talent," informs the young generation that Maupassant was a coarse brute without brains or "nuances" and compares him to a sort of cheap photographic camera or shoddy gramophone. The result has been that, so far, young students of French modern literature have been brought up by their professors at the grammar schools to despise one of the men who, whatever else may be said of him and his subjects, is incontestably one of the finest manipulators of the French language that ever set pen to paper. His prose, supremely good, is so clear and limpid, and has so generic and particular a perfume, that the average student of French literature to whom a few lines of his writing should be submitted, with an invitation to name their author, would have no more difficulty in proclaiming them "du Maupassant" than he would have in naming the author of any lines from Lafontaine's fables. *Ne faict ce tour qui veult.* Maupassant's friends and admirers all over the world, while they may resent the injustice that has been meted out to him by the Universitarians, are no more con-

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

cerned for his future than, for instance, Flaubert was for the immortality of Pierre Corneille, of whom he never wrote without adding the ironical description :  
• “An unknown author.”

In the last years of his literary career, Maupassant gradually abandoned one of his most lucrative sources of income, the contribution of short stories and articles to the papers. He described himself as too tired for regular work. He concentrated himself on two novels, *L'Âme Étrangère* and *L'Angelus*. The former had been laid aside and he was concentrating on the latter, when his mind failed and his pen had to be laid aside forever, but that irony of fate which pursued this unhappy man all through his life was at pains to demonstrate after the curtain had fallen, from the success of his plays, *Musotte* and *La Paix du Ménage*, as from the fragments of his unpublished novels that his ten years of literary activity in Paris might well come to be considered just as much mere apprenticeship to a greater mastery as his ten years in the Civil Service had been but preparation for the great things that in so short a time he did produce.

Well might the Titanic Zola say over his grave, in Montparnasse Cemetery on July 9th, 1893, that, “apart from his glory as a writer, he will remain as one of the men who have been the most fortunate and the most unfortunate on this earth.”

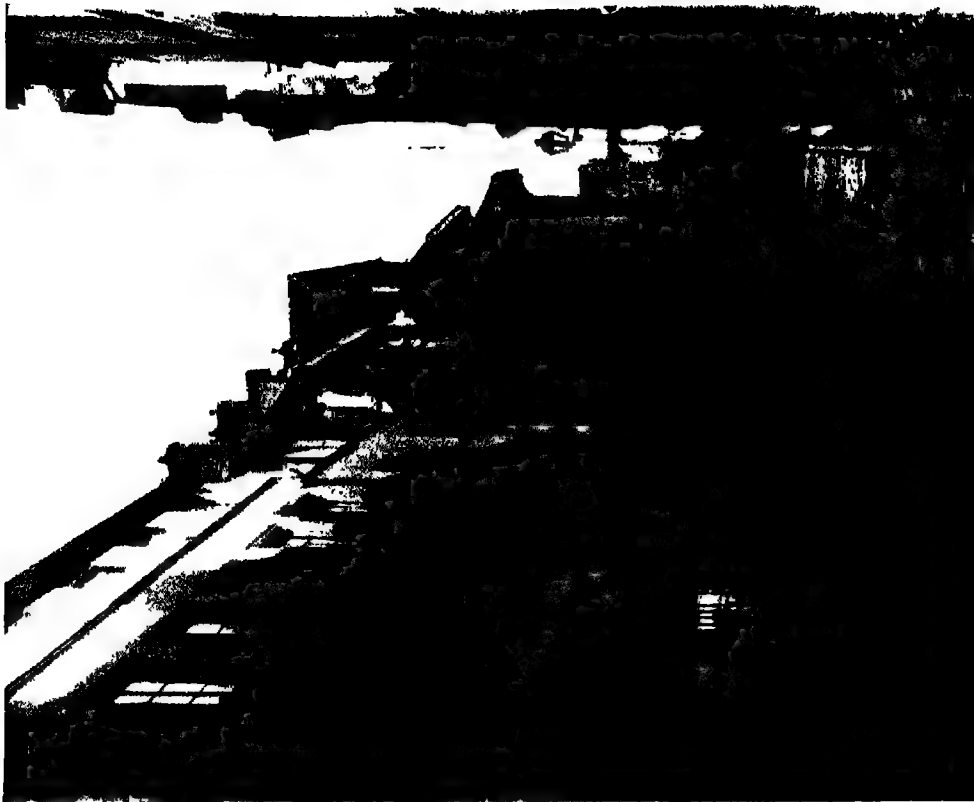
## CHAPTER XXVII

The First Alarm—Maupassant and Madame Adam—His Stories of Prowess—Dr. Grubby's Regimen—Maupassant's Chilliness—His Hallucinations—Autoscopy—A Spider Hunt—Mental Activity—Maupassant as a Tenant—The Fatal Woman—A Visit to Aix—The Flaubert Memorial—Goncourt's Spiteful Remarks—Pol Neveux's Testimony—Curious Coincidences.

**I**T was, perhaps, Madame Juliette Adam, the editress of *La Nouvelle Revue*, in which several of Maupassant's stories had been published, who gave the first serious alarm about the state of the writer's health. In the course of 1889 she received at her country house at Gif a note from him, saying: "I'm going to come on Thursday to ask you for lunch. Don't have anybody else. I want to speak to you all by myself." Madame Adam was delighted to receive him. She has thus formulated her opinion on him as a writer:

"What can one say about Maupassant that people don't know? You have only got to read twenty pages of such a master to be dominated by the magic of his style, to go where he wants to take you, to submit to—even to the point of anguish—the intense lifelikeness of his characters, never to be able to forget the being or the picture which he puts before your mind; in one word, to admire the power of an art which is made up of brutal observation and refinement of form."

Maupassant came and was in high, good spirits. He thought it a joke that Madame Adam should appear to be rather anxious about him.



RUE DE L'EAU-DE-REREC IN ROUEN, SCENE OF THE STORY "QUI SAIT," WHERE A MAN'S FURNITURE MOVES IN AND OUT OF HIS HOUSE, WHICH WAS CONSIDERED THE FIRST TALE IN WHICH HE SHOWED SIGNS OF INSANITY.



PASTEL PORTRAIT OF MAUPASSANT, BY HENRI GERVEX. SAID TO REMIND ONE OF HIS PORTRAIT AS A BOY OF TEN. (See *plate facing page 80.*)



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

"There's nothing the matter with me," he said. "I only wanted to spend a day in chatting with you."

They talked till lunch time, mainly about Flaubert, and after lunch they went and sat in the ruins of a Benedictine church which are in the grounds at Gif. Maupassant had as usual only taken St. Galmier water at the meal, but suddenly grew very excited.

"He began talking, became most emphatic and didn't wait for my answers," says Madame Adam. "He told me with a spirit and a boldness of thought which impressed me painfully, what it was his intention to be and to think, what he wanted his life to be, for otherwise. . . ."

"For otherwise, what?" I exclaimed, as he violently pronounced the words.

" 'Otherwise, it means disorder in my mind, it means Nature becoming chaotic, it's my losing the meaning of things and I kill myself, I kill myself.' "

"I looked at this big rosy-cheeked chap, who loved life so passionately, who exuded vitality at every pore, and who kept on repeating: 'I shall kill myself, if any philosophical or religious argument of yours upsets my conception and my comprehension of what is, of what I want it to be.' "

Madame Adam scolded him gently and told him how distressing it was to her to hear that something she might say might drive him to blow out his brains. She added that she had always thought him a man of marvellous mental balance, and "here you have been talking like a madman."

"The word 'madman' made him shudder. He looked at me with vague eyes. 'My brother, you know, is already mad; yes, mad. Didn't you know that he is no longer at Antibes, but in a private asylum? When will my turn come?'"



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

Madame Adam told him to stop talking nonsense and to come and have a game of bowls with her, which would be much better than conversation of that nature.

According to François, Maupassant had been talking rather wildly on several occasions during that year, 1889. Possibly he was only making fun of his valet, possibly it was the Boissel of *L'Héritage* in him that was speaking. However, it was that year that François, who had now been in his service for six years, first heard of a terrible encounter his master had had one night down at Etretat as he was going home to La Guillette, with a monstrous dog, who was bent on devouring him and with whom he had a battle-royal for a long time, rolling about in the ditch. To this encounter, during the course of which he had been badly bitten, he put a sudden stop by thrusting a large stone down the dog's throat. This having put the brute temporarily *hors de combat*, Maupassant ran back to fetch his stick, and when he returned to the scene of encounter, to finish the dog off, he found that it had run away without making a sound. The next morning he found the dog lying on the mat outside his door. It wagged its tail and came crawling to his feet and licked his wounded hands. Maupassant gave him milk, as he "fancied his throat might be sore from having had a stone forced down it." This story was told with numerous details. On another occasion he told François that in one season's boating he had brought to shore thirteen bodies from the river, of which two were still alive.

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

That he was, in 1889, in poor health may be gauged from the fact that it was in the summer of that year that he put himself into the hands of a Parisian specialist, Doctor Grubby. Grubby found him terribly run down (Madame Adam says the contrary) and had put him on a superalimentation diet. He was allowed no bread, but was to eat potatoes *à l'Anglaise*—i.e., boiled—three times a day. He was to swallow as many eggs as he could get down his throat, prepared in every possible way; he was to have salt-water fish at every meal and was to eat abundantly of poultry and butcher's meat, with *purées*, but was to abstain as much as possible from green vegetables and altogether from game and wine. He was to drink at least two quarts of milk a day. In addition to this he had several medicines to take. Doctor Grubby must have been an expert on diet, as he managed to prolong his own existence until the age of ninety-three, dying in 1899. The regimen he prescribed for Maupassant seems to indicate that he found him in a state of advanced anaemia, which is one of the results of the trouble—the Hidden Evil—from which Maupassant was suffering, or rather from the drastic depuratives which are prescribed for that trouble. Of these depuratives the most potent is what the famous Doctor Fournier used to call "barometer syrup," and perhaps the best proof that poor Guy must have swallowed inordinate quantities thereof, is that though he seemed a hearty, sanguine and warm-blooded man, he suffered badly from chilliness. His rooms were kept at a

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

temperature of 25° Centigrade (77° Fahrenheit), and in addition to central heating he had open fires in every room. This chilliness, which grew as his poor blood grew thinner and thinner, and drove him to the South and the sun, caused him to dread the cold, damp climate of his native Normandy. There is a letter of his extant to Robert Pinchon at Rouen, telling him that he has to come to that city on business, and asks him to find him a room which gets the sun and where a good fire can be kept up. "I am suffering from neuralgia," he explains, "and require a tropical heat." Extreme sensitiveness to cold is one of the minor evils which result from what used to be called a salivation.

In poor Guy's case the horrible process of mental and physical disintegration which leads to general paralysis and death was further complicated by nervous and cerebral troubles which were the direct result of excesses, but which in themselves would never have led this bull-like frame to catastrophe. Scores of brain-workers have had the same experiences from overwork, myriads of ordinary citizens also who have monkeyed with their nervous systems, from excessive drinking, or from the use of drugs. One of the disorders from which Maupassant was known to have suffered was what is called autoscopia. On several occasions he saw himself in the room in which he was sitting, as plainly as though he had been looking in a glass. M. J. Joseph-Renaud records having been told by René Maizeroy, the writer, that

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

one night in 1883, having said good-night to Maupassant at past midnight on the boulevard des Batignolles—both writers were then living in that quarter—he was aroused about twenty minutes later by the arrival of Maupassant at his apartment.

“Maupassant was livid and was quaking with fear. He explained, stammering from emotion, that when he got home, on entering his study, he saw his double seated in his chair and apparently reading with attention a book which he, Maupassant, had begun to read before going out. To reassure him, Maizeroy walked back with him to his flat. There was, of course, nobody in the armchair, which a few minutes earlier had seemed to the novelist to be occupied.”

Maupassant was writing *Une Vie* at the time, and at the same time was enjoying life in Paris to the utmost. His vision was naturally nothing but the outcome of what is called in American slang, “a jag.” People on a jag see all sorts of things, from little black spots before their eyes to polychromous specimens of the animal and reptilian worlds. Autoscopia, as the result of nervous exhaustion from overwork, is not uncommon with literary people. Cases of autoscopia are recorded of Goethe, Shelley and Alfred de Musset. The last described in verse how :

“Devant ma table vint s’asseoir  
Un pauvre enfant vêtu de noir  
Qui me ressemblait comme un frère.”

Doctor Paul Sollier\* has written a book on the

\*The doctor who, recently, very effectively smashed up Sigmund Freud, with his “complexes,” his “reactions,” “libido” and other rubbish which, especially in the U.S.A., is so largely made use of by story writers.

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

subject and specially studies Maupassant's case. He relates another instance of his hallucination :

" Being seated at his work-table in his study, he seemed to hear someone opening his door. His servant had strict orders never to enter the room when he was working. Maupassant turned round and was not a little surprised to see himself, in his own person, come and sit down opposite to him, and, leaning his head on his hand, begin to dictate to him all that he was writing. When he had finished, he rose up and the hallucination vanished."

It is pointed out that Maupassant describes such visions in *La Horla*, taken, it is suggested, from his own experiences. On the other hand there is the irrefutable testimony of Monsieur de Porto-Riche that it was he who supplied Maupassant with this story of a man haunted by his own imaginary double.

In this year, 1889, Maupassant had the terrible shock of his brother's illness and death; he was being worried for money; his eyes were troubling him dreadfully. Indeed his anxiety about his eyes had become really acute the year previously, as is shown in passages in *Fort Comme La Mort*, which was published in 1888, and in which novel Maupassant describes himself under the name of the hero : Olivier Bertin.

In the beginning of August, 1889, down at La Guillette, Maupassant one day declares that he cannot sleep in his house because every bed is full of spiders. He gives François the strictest orders to close all the windows "because the nasty things climb up by the balconies and so get into the rooms." That evening a big spider hunt is organized. The bag in three of the

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

bedrooms is only a few tiny insects of the daddy-long-legs variety, but in Maupassant's own room, there are seen scurrying away behind the looking-glass two plump, black spiders. François wants to move the glass so as to get at them, but Maupassant objects, as the glass might get broken and it is precious to him "because the pedestal of the mirror was the work of a mystic and represents what would have been the coat-of-arms of the Le Poittevin family, if they had used their titles of nobility." So the bed is drawn out into the middle of the room, and a black cloth is hung across the recess in which it had stood. Maupassant hides behind the cloth and makes "soft music with his mouth," while François directs the rays of a lamp into the spiders' retreat. These, either charmed by Maupassant's dulcet sounds, or worried by the lamp, presently rush out and along the cornice into the gloom behind the black cloth. Here they are captured and at once conveyed as a supper supplement to the fishes in the basin. Maupassant points out to François that the fishes do not readily swallow the two black spiders, though the smaller fry they had seemed thoroughly to enjoy, and adds: "Do you think they scent the poison? It's quite possible. They are dangerous beasts, as much by their strong pincers as by the poison they squirt from their glands." François narrates all this in a perfectly matter-of-fact way.

His mental activity and his power of work were such at this period—in spite of his continued dalliance

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

in the lists of love—that being engaged in July, 1889, on *Notre Cœur*, which being in a new field of fiction must have been a somewhat difficult task, even for him, he laid the manuscript aside in order to write an article for *Le Gaulois* and a short story of which the idea had come to him. This story had not been carried about for months in his head, but “was there complete, erect within my mind,” as he said. In four days it was written. The manuscript consisted of seventy-two pages of sermon paper, which would represent a story of about 14,000 words. There was not a single correction on any one of the pages, but, possibly because he considered its production in that time as a *tour de force*, he had it copied. He wished to preserve the original manuscript.

It was in November of that year that he moved from the rue Montchanin to the Avenue Victor Hugo. It was here that he complained of the noise made by a baker whose workshop was in the basement, which, he said, prevented him from sleeping. The letter which he wrote to his landlord on this subject, in which he demanded the cancellation of his lease, is extant, and has been cited as evidence that the *folie de la persecution* was already then at work within him. The letter reads as a sensible business communication, the composition of a particularly sane, level-headed man. It might have been the work of Maître Jacob. During his short stay in this impossible apartment, he gave one or two parties, at one of which was an architect who had been called in to verify, with the rest of the

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

guests, the nuisance complained of. The guests included two doctors. The party sat up late, as the worthy baker ~~did~~ not begin his operations until close on midnight, and the conversation turned on death and the survivance of the soul. Maupassant suddenly said : " Were I dangerously ill and my friends brought a priest to my bedside, I should consent to receive him." The company, atheistically inclined, professed to be shocked, and one of the doctors said : " To please your friends only, of course." Maupassant looked annoyed and said nothing, but began pulling a rose to pieces, leaf by leaf, very slowly. The nuisance being established professionally, Maupassant's lease was torn up, but as the apartment did not please him he would not wait in Paris till he could find a new one. On Jan. 12th he left for Cannes, leaving his servant behind with orders to look for another flat for him for April. On January 10th, before going South, he met Edmond de Goncourt and told him that he was looking for a bedroom to sleep, as the noise of the omnibuses and the drays passing in the Avenue Victor Hugo prevented him from sleeping in the new apartment he had rented in that street. Not a word about the baker or his quarrel about him. There seems to be some Norman *finauderie* here. Goncourt's previous entry concerning Maupassant appears in his *Journal* under date, June 15th, 1889. He relates that Octave Mirbeau had been dining with him. Mirbeau had just returned from Mentone, where he had seen a good deal of Maupassant. Goncourt writes :



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

"He speaks curiously of the fear of death which haunts Maupassant, which is the reason for his perpetual moving about on land and sea, to escape from this ~~fixed~~ idea."

Maupassant returned to Paris from a stay of two months on the Riviera without his faithful François. There was probably an *amour* (or several) in progress, about which he wished his servant to know nothing. The effects were marked on his face. He looked very ill and tired-out. In the meanwhile his household had had a loss. "Pussy," his favourite cat, had been "put down" in his absence, apparently because the vet. suspected rabies. Maupassant was as fond of stroking the cat, as is H. E. Gaston Doumergue, the present President of the French Republic, who takes his pussy with him wherever he goes, even on official journeys. To make up for this occupation for his fingers, Maupassant developed the habit of brushing his hair and bringing out showers of electric sparks from them. There was vitality here.

He was beginning to sleep badly, complained of pains, and from 11 p.m. till two in the morning was always calling for his servant to bring him camomile tea or to put dry-cups on the aching places. In the meanwhile he was being continually visited by a fair incognita, who had probably followed him from Cannes, whom he used to receive in his apartment and not in the bachelor's *pied-à-terre*, which had been fitted up for him in the dame rue Boccador, near his apartment, to be used for rendezvous of that nature. The new apartment was a splendid one and gave

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

through the rooms en suite a stretch of over 23 yards for "panther" exercise. Maupassant had had heavy curtains fixed up in his bedroom—not to exclude the view of the Eiffel Tower, which he detested and which he said drove him away from Paris during the Exhibition, but to hide the sight of the incognita from any indiscreet overlookers. As to the lady, who was afterwards spoken about as *la femme fatale* and largely rendered responsible for his insanity and death (quite unjustly, of course), François says:

"How queer. I hardly know this woman. When she comes in, she just gives M. de Maupassant's name, and without even a glance at me, walks into the drawing-room. Monsieur never says a word about her."

Maupassant is still on the superalimentation regimen and takes four full meals a day. He suffers bad pains in his limbs and tries vapour baths, but abandons these as he is menaced with an apoplectic stroke. At the same time he is finishing *Notre Cœur*, which appears serially in the *Revue de Deux Mondes*, and he says about it—he used to enjoy "besting" editors and publishers—"You can't imagine how I loathe all the commercial part of getting a new book out." *Notre Cœur* appears in book form also on June 20th. Incognita is still vampirizing poor Guy, comes continually. Rings, enters and departs without a word. "She is no *cocotte*, though she uses too much scent, nor is she a *mondaine*." François was prepared to wager that she was a "*bourgeoise* of the top of the basket," some woman who had been brought up at

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

the Sacré Cœur or at Les Oiseaux. She had the "good, stiff manners that girls acquire there." She was of a remarkable beauty and used to dress "with extreme elegance in tailor-made costumes. These were always pearl-grey or ashen-grey in colour, and she wore a belt of pure gold strands."

In July, Maupassant goes to Aix-les-Bains, doubtless for the reason for which most invalids went there, though he says that he has come to get notes for his new novel, *L'Ame Etrangère*. There is a Russian princess living at the villa which was formerly the Empress Eugenie's home at Aix, and Maupassant is always calling at the Villa des Fleurs. François is put on the lady's track also, and as he speaks a little Russian is able to get some useful information out of one of H.H.'s footmen when they meet at the servants' dinner. One of the items that he was able to bring back to his master, who sketched the lady in the only part of the book that he wrote, was that H.H. had two lovers living with her. They never left her. At nights each was accommodated with a little bed in the lady's bedroom, one on each side of her four-poster. Her husband was a Russian official of high standard who was hardly ever able to leave Russia. Towards the end of July Maupassant goes to Cannes and has a delightful time yachting on the *Bel-Ami*. Bernard and Raymond, the sailors, as well as François are encouraged to enliven the hours when the boat is at anchor by telling stories, not always very proper. Maupassant also tells stories, and one of



LAST PORTRAIT OF MAUPASSANT, SHOWING HAVOC WORKED.



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

them was an absolutely fictitious account of why he was expelled from Yvetôt Seminary.

"When I was fourteen," he related, "I was at Yvetôt College. They used to give us a fearful mixture called *abondance* to drink. To revenge ourselves for this beastly treatment, one of us managed, one evening, to pinch the headmaster's bunch of keys. When the director and the ushers had gone to sleep, we ransacked the larder and the cellar and collared all the best brands of fine wines and brandy that we could lay hands on. These, with a thousand precautions, were carried up to the roof of the college and there we had a devil of a booze-up. . . . It was four o'clock in the morning when the alarm was given. As I was one of the ringleaders, and especially because I would not disclaim the responsibility of my acts, I got chucked out. I didn't mind a bit, as at the grammar school at Rouen, where I was sent next, I was much better off."

The conditions under which he had left Yvetôt school at the age of seventeen are perfectly well established.

In November of that year he goes down to Rouen to be present at the inauguration of the memorial tablet to Flaubert. Goncourt sees him in the train and, not without satisfaction, records:

"I am struck this morning by Maupassant's very bad looks, by the way his face is wasted, by his brick-coloured complexion, by 'the marked character' (as they say on the stage) that his person has assumed and even by the morbid fixity of his look. He does not seem to me fated to get old bones. In passing over the Seine, just as we were entering Rouen, he stretches out his hand, pointing to the river covered over with fog, and cries out: 'It's to my boating there in the mornings that I owe what I've got to-day.'"

Goncourt was indignant because Maupassant disappeared after the ceremony—he had gone to see a

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

friend—and that nothing further was heard of the “lunch” or snack that he had invited his fellow-travellers to join him in after the function was over. This complaint is typical of Goncourt’s attitude towards poor Guy. He and Zola and Maupassant and others had been met at the station by M. Leteurte, who took them to his house in the rue de Renard, where a banquet was served them. The Prefect was present and other notabilities. The following is the menu, of which Goncourt copiously partook:

“Huitres de Courseulle, Quartier de Chevreuil, sauce Nesselrode, Filet à la Rossini, sauce Perigueux, Dinde Truffée, Aspics de Foie Gras, Salade Russe, Crevettes des Petites Dalles, Pudding Diplomate, Desserts. Vins : Medoc en Carafes, Haut Sauterne, St. Emilion, Château-Yquem 1874, Mouton Rothschild, Champagne Henry Goulet.”

It seems hardly credible that, having had a luncheon like this at 1 p.m., Goncourt should be heard complaining at 3.30 p.m. that Maupassant had done him out of some light refreshment before dinner at 6.30. Yet he registered his dissatisfaction in his Diary. During the meal he had found an opportunity of venting some of his spleen against “the most fortunate of men”; Maupassant had been talking about the places where he liked to live, which were not in Normandy, and Zola called out: “You had some idea of buying a place at Andrésy. You have given up the idea and you are very wise to do so. The only sensible thing to do, is to be a tenant always and everywhere.” Goncourt was heard to mutter to his neighbour:

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

"Yes, tenant in every respect, tenant of the house and tenant of the wife." He had no doubt been irritated to hear Zola speaking in high admiration of Maupassant's extraordinary dexterity at all kinds of sports and athletics. Doctor Grout was standing near Maupassant under the rain at the inauguration. Already two years before at a dinner where Goncourt was present also—it was at the Princess Mathilde's—Maupassant looking "much less vulgar than usually"—another guest had been Doctor Blanche, who entertained the company with stories about his establishment at Passy, which had formerly belonged to the Princess de Lamballe. Thus circumstances on two occasions had put Maupassant into the society of two of the three men who were afterwards to be his warders in a lunatic asylum.\*

\* Another coincidence in connection with the house at Passy, where Maupassant was confined and where he died, is that the husband of the Princess de Lamballe was also a victim of the Hidden Evil, which carried him off by phagedenic process at the age of 20. It was generally said that he had been inveigled into debauchery, for that very purpose, by Philippe Egalité, who wanted Lamballe's sister, Egalité's wife, to inherit the vast estates of her father, the Duc de Bourbon-Penthièvre. Penthièvre had inherited these estates from his father, the Duc de Maine, one of the legitimized bastards of Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan. These had been dowered with lands blackmailed from the Grande Demoiselle after her marriage to Lauzun, as the price of her husband's release from Pignerol and the company of Fouquet and Count Mattioli. So the house at Passy to which Maupassant came to die had once been the property of *the* Lauzun, and Lauzun was a name cherished in the Maupassant family, because an ancestress of theirs, a Maupassant girl, who had married a Monsieur Chardon, had been the adulterine mistress of *a* not *the* Lauzun (as biographers seem to imply), the Lauzun whose name was Armand-Louis de Gontaut duc de Biron, who helped to subdue Corsica, in which campaign he was accompanied and encouraged by Madame Chardon, née Maupassant. He was guillotined in 1793, at the age of 46, and is particularly remembered because, having just finished lunch when M. Sanson came for him, he said to the executioner: "I'm sorry I've finished all the oysters, but here's some



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

Goncourt might have had some pity on poor Guy, for he looked very ill indeed, and his cosmopolitan fame and large royalties might have been forgiven to a man, of whom Pol Neveux wrote, referring to his appearance at Rouen on that occasion :

“ Maupassant is unrecognizable ; those who like me met him, emaciated and shivering, on that rainy Sunday when the monument to Flaubert was inaugurated at Rouen, had great difficulty in recalling him. As long as I live, I shall see that face, shrivelled up with pain, those big eyes at bay, which a protestation against an iniquitous fatality lit up with dying lights.”

Disaster now comes galloping along.

white wine left and you must drink a glass of it. In a trade like yours, I should fancy you needed something of the sort to keep you going.” The Maupassants were very proud of this connection, especially Guy, who had a portrait of la Chardon and always had it hung in the place of honour in his houses. Lauzun, therefore, would be an honoured name with him, who came to die in a house which once had been a Lauzun's property.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

Maupassant and Drugs—A Martyr to Headaches—*Coelum Non Animam*—Maupassant and “Society”—In search of a Face—A Mouse-Drive at Luchon—What His Letters Revealed—The Gallop of Disaster—Outbreak of Xmas Eve—For the Last Time with His Mother—The Tragedy at the Chalet—His Removal to Passy—An Agony of Eighteen Months—Death the Liberator.

**D**OCTOR MEURIOT, the chief physician at Doctor Blanche's establishment, used to tell people after Maupassant's death, that he had largely contributed to the disaster that befell him by the abuse of ether, of haschish, opium, cocaine and morphine. This was undoubtedly a mistake on Doctor Meuriot's part. François never hints at such a thing. Maupassant's night were the usual ones of insomnia victims. He used fatally to wake up at about two in the morning and then his valet used to bring him camomile tea. No reference is ever made to the use of any sleeping draught. “Sigma” declares Maupassant never touched any of these drugs, that Maupassant “told me (and told me more than once, always treating the rumours as a good joke) that this rumour was devoid of truth.” Yet Maupassant admits in his writings occasionally to have made use of ether. He suffered fearfully from headaches\* and used ether to calm them. On page 134 *et seq.* of *Sur l'Eau*, he describes the effects of the ether one night

\* As far back as 1880. In 1891, Jules Huret interviewed him and found him suffering from violent neuralgic pains in his head, which he attributed to the air and noise of Paris.

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

that, on board the *Bel-Ami*, "headache, the hideous evil, headache which tortures as no torments have ever been able to torture, which grinds the head into atoms, makes one go mad," headache had seized upon him. In this account of his inhalation (not drinking) of ether, he compares this drug with haschish and opium, which shows that he had experimented with both. He never anywhere refers to cocaine. In one of his stories he exalts the delights of ether-inhalation. He was certainly no victim to it, nor had Doctor Blanche to treat him for this habit.

The year, 1891, which is the last of his rational life, was characterized by extreme restlessness. He kept moving from place to place, as though to try and escape from the hideous anxiety, that as his symptoms became more and more pronounced, never ceased to haunt him. He suffers bitterly from the cold and wears furs, which French gentlemen never do, furs being considered the garments of dentists and opera-singers only in France. He goes out very little, reads not at all and regrets being unable to work as much as he would like to. He has quite changed his views about his craft and says there are things that he loves to write about and that his talk about writing only for money was not altogether true. In February he goes to Nice and has ten days of quiet in a villa close to his mother's, where the orange-blossoms in the garden soothe him to sleep. In ten days, however, he leaves on the *Bel-Ami*, which has been fitted up for a long voyage. She only goes to Cannes, where Maupassant

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

visits the "fatal woman," who is living in a tree-embowered villa, which has gilded balconies. Bad weather prevents the projected cruise along the Spanish coast and to Tangiers, and the *Bel-Ami* returns to Nice. Some days are spent in cruising about that admirable coast. Maupassant is very tired, but continues to work at his *L'Angelus* and spends some afternoons in the cabin of the *Bel-Ami*, while François takes the helm, in writing his last *chronique* for *Le Figaro*. It is entitled *L'Empereur*.

• He seemed happy only when on board his boat. One of his friends saw him putting out to sea at Cannes. He was holding the helm, his face was illuminated, and "Free, Free, I am Free," he cried.

Incognita remains at Cannes, and Maupassant returns to Paris, where he leads a chaste, regular life and takes care of himself. The result is that he gets very much better and looks it. His face fills out and the general emaciation disappears. This is another proof that he could always recuperate from his excesses and that it was not they that killed him. People who have written about him, even Pol Neveux, speak of the megalomania and *folie de la persécution* that manifested themselves in his acts and letters during this period. With regard to the latter, the irritability he showed seems natural enough in his state of health. As to megalomania, it is rather difficult to live at Cannes, the "town of titles," as it was in those days, without coming to talk about the different Highnesses and so forth with whom one comes in contact. It is

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

certain Maupassant had no admiration for these folk. He has expressed himself very bitterly about "society," and as to Highnesses he declared he never wanted to meet another one, because when a Highness was present, everybody had to keep standing and that he for his part was sick of remaining on his feet a whole evening. He was continually run after by "society." One morning at Cannes he receives seventy invitations. When he does go out, he refuses to allow himself to be shown off, but sits through a dinner, at his hostess's right hand and hardly opens his mouth. He appears to those who live with him to be recovering his peace of mind, but since his death there have come to light some most poignant letters which he wrote during this last year, which show the *inferno* in which he was living. His very writing shows his condition. This master of French makes spelling and grammatical errors. Words are left out, there are erasures and words with others written over them. Pol Neveux in his masterly preface to Louis Conard's edition of Maupassant's works quotes from some letters written at this time which had not been published before. Here are some of these revelations of the anguish of his soul :

"It's so warm now," he writes from Cannes, "under the sun which inundates my windows. Why can't I give myself up entirely to the happiness of this well-being? Some dogs that howl express my condition very well. It—their howling—is a lamentable complaint addressed to nobody, going nowhere, telling you nothing, but filling the nights with a cry of linked anguish that I would like to be able to put forth. If I could

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

groan as they do, I would sometimes, often, go out into some vast plain or into the depths of a forest, and I would howl as they do for hours together in the dark. It seems to me that that would ease me."

He feels he can write no longer :

" My mind follows dark valleys, which lead me I know not whither. One follows on another, they twist and turn in devious ways, they are deep and long and insurmountable. I come out of one of them and enter another, and I do not know what there will be at the end of the last of them. I am afraid lest my lassitude later on may decide me not to continue any longer this useless wayfaring."

Threats and suggestions of suicide are very frequent at this time in his mouth and in his letters. To one doctor he said entreatingly : " Tell me : Do you think I am going mad? For if so I shall kill myself at once. Death is greatly preferable to insanity."

He professed in conversation to attribute his general *malaise* to an " incurable influenza," and as to the pains in his head and bones he puts them down to rheumatism. It is difficult to believe or to hope that the poor man was not very well aware what really was the matter with him. The many doctors whom he consulted can scarcely have sufficiently concealed from so keen an observer the overwhelming consternation which beset each one of them at the relentless conviction to which each was forced to come as to what an end awaited this man amongst men, this artist amongst artists. One great savant-doctor of world-wide reputation—who walked with him one night in 1890 on the road from Cannes—burst into tears on

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

leaving him. Is it possible to hope that Maupassant did not understand? He was determined, however, not to allow himself to survive after his reason had succumbed and seems to have hoped against hope that his huge physical strength and his powerful brain would be able to fight the Evil down. These forlorn makeshifts and haphazardous journeys in the search for health add to the tragedy of this last year. He leaves Paris on June 27th for Luchon, for the baths there, but proceeds to it leisurely, for he is looking for a type of female beauty which he wants for *L'Angelus*. He explores Arles, and though at a convent there he finds a wonderful picture which he describes as superior to the Titiano at Florence, this is not the face he is in quest of. He goes to Tarascon, the home of the *hâbleurs* of the South. Avignon, where for the first time, music causes him acute distress, he discovers in a glass case in the church of Notre Dame des Doms, a life-sized doll representing Saint Nevia-Felicité—the gift of Pius IX—which has the very face he is looking for, or at least, “the rough diamond which it will be mine to cut.” He is very enthusiastic and foresees that *L'Angelus* is to be his best book. From the fragments one has seen of it and from the evidence of men like Dorchain, who heard it read, his anticipation might very well have been realized. “In *L'Angelus*,” he said at Avignon, “I shall give all the force of expression of which I am capable; every detail will be developed with a care which will have nothing fatiguing about it.” And the poor man, who

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

had only six months left to live as a rational being, added :

"I feel admirably fit to write this book. I have it all perfectly in my head. It was all thought out with an astonishing facility. It will be the crowning of my literary career, and I am sure that it will provoke such enthusiasm in any artist who reads it that he will ask himself whether he is reading fiction or fact."

• At Bagnères de Luchon, Maupassant finds the smell of the sulphur so distressing that he decides not to continue his baths there. The Spanish medical superintendent readily agrees that the cure here could not do him any good. Did the author of *Mont-Oriol* really see nothing ominous in the ready compliance of the doctor with the departure of a famous guest, whose presence at the spa would have been a great advertisement for it, just as his collapse or death there would have been a great disaster, commercially speaking? So the weary pilgrim goes up to Divonne on the Swiss frontier, and takes rooms at a farmhouse outside the town. Here they are disturbed at nights and a big mouse-drive is organized. Let François describe what happened, so that the responsibility rest with him :

"With the marketing-bag and other devices invented by my master, we captured thirty-two of these little beasts, which forthwith underwent the fate of St. Lawrence the Martyr"—(he was roasted to death on a gridiron)—"Only, instead of the gridiron, they had a brilliant *feu de joie*. I kept thinking, 'If only Piroli were here, what a beano.' My master wasn't very satisfied. We hadn't caught a single rat, and it was the rats, it appears, who made all the row."



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

It was the next day after this exploit that Maupassant spoke to his servant about Christ as they were standing by a crucifix near the cemetery.

Maupassant has a tricycle, and, in addition to walking into Divonne twice a day for his showerbath, takes long rides in the surrounding country. One day he rides over to Ferney to look at Voltaire's château. Another day he rides nearly to Geneva to visit a friend, finds her away and faints on the return journey. He falls off his tricycle and bruises his ribs. The doctor fixes him up, but Maupassant has bad nights, and rarely gets to sleep till the morning. Yet when, two or three days later, on August 17th, the "marble woman" turns up, "on her way to Switzerland," Maupassant receives her with open arms. She stays with him for six days, but "my master sees her depart with pleasure." Two days later Maupassant is talking excitedly about a story he intends to write: *La Première Nuit*. He has been able to collect all sorts of interesting notes for such a tale in the different rooms where he has been sleeping of late, where the walls were thin, notably at the Hôtel de Noailles at Marseilles. One day he tells of how he first met the "marble woman." He had come across her at Andrésey in a boskage on the island, reading *Une Vie*, "devouring it." She was married, but did not like her husband.

After her departure, Maupassant picks up again, drafts an article on fishing for the *Gaulois* and writes a sonnet for Gounod. He continues to work on

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

*L'Angelus.* It was while at Divonne that he went to see Dorchain, the poet, and read him chapters from this novel and brought tears to everybody's eyes, including his own. He had been over to Champel, hoping that there they would give the ice-cold "Charcot shower," which the doctors at Divonne had refused him. It seems now that it was on this occasion that he wrote to Taine inviting him to attend the Flaubert inauguration, which had taken place eight months previously.

• Disaster was indeed coming at a gallop.

On September 18th he is back at his apartment in the rue Boccador and goes to see the doctor who had wept over him on the Cannes road the previous year. Doctor G——, so Maupassant reports, "finds him absolutely well," but apparently would like another opinion, and a consultation is decided upon. In the meanwhile the "fatal woman," whom François now simply designates as "the vampire," comes to the rue Boccador on September 20th. She spends the afternoon with Maupassant. A week later he has rushed after her to Cannes, and on the 30th of September telegraphs to his mother at Nice, from Cannes:

*"Dear Mother, I am in admirable health. Am no longer frightened Cannes. Making delicious excursions on the sea. Shall stay till 10th (Oct.), then shall go and drink a draught of three weeks' fashionable life in Paris to prepare for my work. Bruises still painful. Will come to dinner with you on Sunday. Guy de Maupassant."*

When he gets back to Paris he is suffering from an

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

unspeakable *malaise*, and on the 19th of October, Doctor G—— and M. Daremberg have a consultation. Their manner, their reticences, and their looks seem to have scared Maupassant at last. He is very dejected after they have gone. He has all the bottles of scent cleared out of his room, for, he says, these had done him a lot of harm. He admits that he has been imprudent in his relations with the "marble woman." On the 21st he writes to his mother. This letter does not appear to be extant, and Lumbroso gives, erroneously, one written on March and another written in June, as "the last *letters* Maupassant wrote to Madame de Maupassant."

On the 29th October, Maupassant leaves the rue Boccador, which he was not to see again. François carries a specially-made bag, containing his master's manuscripts and letters. As they leave the house the concierge woman bursts into tears.

In November, he is at the Châlet de l'Isère at Cannes. It is lovely weather. Maupassant works slowly but steadily at *L'Angelus*. Friends come to see him from Paris and he drives them out and takes them for sails on the *Bel-Ami*. All is apparently well and nothing betrays the hideous struggle that is going on within him. It is then that he wrote: "There are whole days on which I feel I am done for, finished, blind, my brain used up yet still alive." He has the terrible precursors of locomotor ataxia, his legs betray him, the heel, when he sets it down, jerks upwards.

W. H. R. 11

Je voudrais bien que j'écrivisse. J'en  
enquiesse mais trop tardivement,  
trop bien chère mère, mais  
je ne puis pas plus et  
je m'en vais en attendant  
dans l'attente. Une maison  
est élevée, comme  
l'établissement d'ailleurs  
à tous les vents de  
l'air et de tous les glaces  
nous vaici dans les  
cours et les souffles  
l'été des mœurs  
m'ont redonné les fers  
d'ailleurs surtout à  
la hâte. Mais les fers  
m'ont exténués et m'ont  
engourdis et m'ont  
je vais me sauver  
je ne sais où, vers la  
patte, mais hésitant  
peu, je vous envoie  
celle. Je vous envoie

Le médecin de Dacames  
m'a dit, en voyant  
votre rectory la quinzaine  
passée, sans même le  
plus simple piquet,  
sans savon, cath. avec  
tant, excepté pour elle,  
que nous nous voyons  
- - - avec le soleil. - - -  
Le 4<sup>e</sup> juillet en  
voyant le bar barbare.  
admirer par les  
très beaux jours  
à l'heure - j'en  
la d'extrême de  
tout en son cœur, mal  
bien à l'heure même. Bien  
à l'heure mille choses  
à son belle. Son  
ton fils  
Gues

Quelques personnes comme moi  
sont et d'ailleurs, en  
raison plus de la science.  
Les yeux ne sont pas  
si bons de l'autre côté.  
ne peuvent supporter cela.



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

He wanders forlornly about his beloved Esterel and seeks the revivification of all its beauties, but: "I have not one single idea that is consecutive to the one before it. I forget words, names of everything, and my hallucinations and my pains tear me to pieces."

Hallucinations, autoscopia and sounds in his ears. He hears voices. This is ordinary enough in cases of nervous exhaustion. It seems hardly worth while for doctors to publish long studies on *Audition Morbide* as exemplified in his case. Most people who have shattered their nerves with drink or drugs or otherwise, hear sounds that are non-existent, explosions, bells jangling, low mutterings, coherent phrases ("Clarence has come, false, fleeting, perjured Clarence"), a whole Bedlam of vocalisation. It is one of the usual features on the "jag" programme.

The first bad outburst took place on Christmas Eve. Maupassant had been expected to go over to the Villa des Ravenelles at Nice to spend the *reveillon* with Madame de Maupassant. Instead, he wires putting her off and inviting two ladies who were staying with her, sisters, to meet him at Cannes and to come for a sail with him on the *Bel-Ami*. They go, Maupassant takes them to St. Marguerite's Island, for the *Réveillon* supper, and then. . . . Nobody knows what happened then and there. François is mute about it. Madame de Maupassant can only record that her guests hurriedly returned to her house to pack their trunks and leave, taking the first train back to Paris, since when they never gave signs of life again, even

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

after Guy's death. However, the next day, Christmas Day, Maupassant seems full of energy and comes into the kitchen at the Châlet de l'Isère to tell the servants and the sailors (who are berthed at the châlet) the plot of a story he is proposing to write, which is to be called *Le Moine de Fécamp*. It is about a queer, monastic hermit he had known near his home in Normandy. Yet just then he had written to a friend: "I cannot write any longer. I can't see to write. It is the disaster of my life."

On the 26th, he comes tottering in from his walk and cries out, he has seen a ghost on the road. The next day he coughs at lunch and declares that a piece of the sole he has been eating has got into his lungs and that this may cause his death. But a little tea puts him right, and in the afternoon he goes for a sail—the last—on the *Bel-Ami*. Raymond, the bo'sun, reports that the skipper could hardly get into the ship's boat to land, his legs almost refusing to carry him. On the 28th, he goes to Nice and spends the day with his mother and seems quite normal. The next day Doctor Daremberg comes to see him, finds him in his bath and has a long chat with him there. On leaving Maupassant, he says: "Your master is a man of great strength, but he has an illness which does not spare the brain. Well, he has been telling me about his journey in Tunisia, with extraordinary facility, quoting dates, names of people he met, without any effort at all and without any hesitation. It all comes spontaneously and without any difficulty whatever; he

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

spoke to me like a man who has no reason to fear anything for a long time to come."

That night and the next, he sleeps better and is so surprised not to be bothered with mosquitoes at the chalet that on the morning of December 31st he goes out to inform himself on the reason of this advantage.

On New Year's Day, he is up at seven and tries to shave himself, but says that there is a mist before his eyes and that he does not think he will be able to go and see his mother, as he had promised her. But after a good breakfast he feels much better, reads his letters and receives the callers who come—with unconscious irony—to wish him a "good and happy new year." At ten o'clock he takes the train with François and goes to Nice. There are different versions of his last day with his mother. François says that he lunched with her, his sister-in-law, niece and aunt, and at four o'clock drove back to the station, buying a box of grapes on the way. He was practising the grape cure at the time. On getting back home he changes clothes, puts on a silk shirt and after dinner of chicken, chicory *à la crème*, and a vanilla custard, washed down with a glass of mineral water, exercises himself by walking up and down his rooms. Occasionally he looks into the kitchen but does not speak to the people there. He goes to his bedroom at ten o'clock and has camomile tea brought to him. He complains of lumbago pains and François puts dry-cups on his back which in the course of an hour relieve him. He goes to bed at half-past eleven, and at half-past twelve,



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

after eating some grapes, he falls asleep. François is anxious. A telegram comes. The messenger says it is from the East. François takes it into Maupassant's room, but, as his master is fast asleep, he lays it down on the table and withdraws.

According to Madame de Maupassant, Guy spent the whole of New Year's Day with her and dined at the villa. He spoke queerly and mentioned at table that he was taking some pills and that one of them had told him some very grave news.

"On New Year's Day, on arriving," says Madame de Maupassant, "Guy, with his eyes full of tears, embraced and kissed me with extraordinary effusion. It was only later, at dinner, when he were alone together, that I noticed that he was wandering in his talk. In spite of my supplications, my tears, instead of going to bed, he insisted on returning at once to Cannes. I ought to say that we had been chatting together all the afternoon, and that, beyond a little excitement, there was nothing abnormal about him. When he spoke of going back to Cannes and insisted upon doing so, what could I, a recluse, crippled with illness, do to prevent him? 'Don't go, my son,' I cried. 'Don't go.' I clung to him to restrain him, I implored him, I dragged my impotent old body at his knees. But he followed his obstinate bent. I saw him disappear into the night, excited, mad, rambling in his talk, going I know not where—poor son of mine."

She never saw Guy again.

At a quarter past two in the morning, François hears a noise in his master's room, and:

"I ran to the little room which opens on to the staircase and saw M. de Maupassant standing there with his throat gashed open. And at once he said to me: 'You see, François, what I've done. I have cut my throat. It's a case of sheer madness.'"



ENTRANCE TO DR. BLANCHE'S LUNATIC ASYLUM IN  
PASSY.



THE CHALET DE L'ISÈRE, CANNES, WHERE MAUPASSANT ATTEMPTED SUICIDE.



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

The deed had been done with a metal paperknife, the only lethal weapon he could lay hands upon. Some days previously, François had taken the cartridges out of his master's revolver, because Maupassant had been firing wildly at night out of the window. Maupassant had tried to shoot himself before using the paperknife. The wound was not a serious one and a doctor sent for at once stitched it together. The two sailors summoned helped to hold their master, who developed violent mania. A straitwaistcoat had to be employed. But before this he seemed calm enough and said nothing while the doctor was present. After he had gone he apologized to his men for having done "such a thing" and giving them so much trouble. The great, burly seafarer, Raymond, sat up with François all that night, choking with sobs. Maupassant slept most of the time. He awoke at eight, took breakfast, but hardly spoke. He had lost colour, seemed completely prostrated and indifferent to all.

On the table by the side of his bed in which he was lying in a straitwaistcoat, lay the telegram that had come in the night. It was a telegram of New Year's greetings and had been opened by one of Maupassant's relatives, summoned from Nice. It had come from the "fatal woman," the "woman in grey," who had not failed to be in at the death.

Maupassant remained in a comatose state all that day. In the evening he got excited and summoned François to arm and follow him to the frontier, as war had been declared.

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL/FATE

It is recorded by one of his friends, what one hopes may not be true, that thinking the sight of his beloved yacht might have a soothing effect upon him, he was taken down to the harbour, under strong escort and restrained by the *camisole de force*, to look at the *Bel-Ami* once more, to bid it farewell. Count Primoli relates :

“ The blue sky, the limpid air, the graceful lines of his beloved yacht, all seemed to calm him. His look became gentle. . . . He contemplated his boat for a long while, with tender and melancholy eyes. . . . His lips moved but no sound issued forth from them. They took him away. He turned his head round several times to give another look at the *Bel-Ami*. All those who were with Guy at the time had their eyes full of tears.”

It occurs to one that the Marquis de Sade might have originated this excursion for Guy de Maupassant.

On the following day an attendant arrives at the villa from Dr Blanche's establishment to arrange for the conveyance of Maupassant to Passy, where he is to be interned. François goes out to pay the bills. Maupassant's butcher bursts into tears as he is receipting the bill, and his wife tells the valet that that is the first time she has ever seen her husband weep during the fifteen years she has been married to him.

On the sixth of January poor Guy travels to Paris in a *wagon-lit* compartment. He is still under restraint and spends the whole of the time of the long journey lying in his berth. At the Gare de Lyon he was met by his publisher, Ollendorff, and his friend, Dr Cazalis. He was in a state of extreme prostration

and recognized neither of them. He was at once conveyed to Dr Blanche's establishment. Here the three doctors examined him. Doctor Blanche dressed the wound in his throat. Dr Meuriot told Cazalis and Ollendorff that their friend had been mad for two years, and that though a cure was not out of the question, it would take a very long time. Kindly Dr Blanche seems at first to have had some hope that his illustrious patient might indeed recover his reason, and this hope was at first general in Paris. One could not believe that a man like Maupassant could really be mad. Indeed three days after Maupassant's arrival the great specialist told François that all hope was not lost. He had been sitting with Maupassant at his lunch and had talked to him on all sorts of topics, putting a question now and then to him. "Monsieur de Maupassant," he afterwards said, "does everything that one asks him to do, and that's a good sign. He made quite sensible replies to all my questions; all hope is not lost. Let us wait."

Of course in those pre-Ehrlich and ante-Wassermann days any treatment that was being given to him was quite useless and the unhampered disease was able to follow its fatal course. Maupassant for weeks seemed quite rational; only very rarely did hallucinations trouble him; his brain, fertile once more, enabled him to delight those about him with funny stories which used to throw them into fits of laughter. And then one day in April, while the faithful François was writing his daily report to Madame de Maupassant,

## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

his master came up to him and said: "I want you to clear out. I don't want to see you again." And he went on to say that he knew that François had been usurping his job on the *Figaro* and, worse, had been slandering him in Heaven. The next day Maupassant received him as usual and asked him when in his opinion they would be able to return together to the rue Boccador.

"*Tant pis*," said Dr Blanche, when he heard what had happened the day before. "It's what I feared," and betook himself away in great distress. It is the conviction of those who had the honour of knowing this great specialist and who saw him during the time that Maupassant was under his care that his anxiety on his behalf and his grief at the havoc he was unable to impede, shortened the life of this kind and genial man, who died a month after Maupassant's death.

From April onward, all hope was lost. A record of the hideous progress of Maupassant's disintegration was kept day by day by one of the doctors. It is in the hands of Count Primoli in Rome, who very rightly has refused to allow it to be published. The same gentleman received several letters from Maupassant during his stay at the house in Passy, and these may, under conditions, be inspected. "Count Joseph Primoli," writes Monsieur George Claretie, the brilliant son of a brilliant father, "possesses some very curious Maupassant autographs. I read them some time ago at his house in Rome. They are the last letters Maupassant wrote from the asylum where he

## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

was confined. Phrases of a poor madman, afflicted with megalomania, dreaming of gold nuggets and of immense fortunes, of mines which he had discovered, of buried treasures. It is lugubrious and heart-rending."

Goncourt was not slow to register the reports about Maupassant's madness, which trickled from his prison house. According to him Maupassant was always raving about money, sending orders to stock-brokers, hunting for buried treasures, accusing his attendant of having robbed him of a sum that each time he spoke of it, increased in magnitude.

Hallucinations persist.

Dr Auguste Marie, of the Ste. Anne's madhouse, writes in his book on *Audition Morbide* :

"In his moments of delirium, he fancied his thoughts had escaped from his head, and searched anxiously for them, asking everybody: 'You haven't seen my thoughts anywhere, have you?' Then suddenly he fancied he saw them, he had found them again and seemed radiant with happiness. There they were all around him and he saw them in the form of butterflies, infinitely varied and coloured according to their subjects: 'Black thoughts for sadness, pink thoughts for merriment, golden butterflies for glory.' And then suddenly he would cry out: 'Oh, what a fine shade of red: it is the purple of sanguinary adulteries.' He seemed to follow the butterflies in their flight, and made gestures as though trying to catch them as they flitted near."

This may have been but a confused reminiscence of what he had read about Doctor Luys' nonsensical theory of the *n*-rays, or coloured emanations from men's heads, visible to mediums, which reveal char-



## THE LIFE, WORK AND EVIL FATE

acter. Stuff, enough to make anybody—not too well—go cracked.

He did not desire the visits of many friends. He had all his friends in horror and asked to be spared their visits. The only society he desired<sup>o</sup> was that of the faithful François, and even him he refused to see or receive during the last three months of his life. His publisher, Ollendorff; Henry Fouquier, the writer, and a rich Israelite named Albert Cahen were alone welcome. His devoted aunt sometimes came. He mistrusted presents and refused some beautiful grapes Mme. de Nouy left for him, saying they were made of copper.

At times he was very violent and had to be restrained in a straitwaistcoat, in which mournful array he was seen for the last time by one of his friends.

He occupied room No. 15 in an annexe. The room was in distemper and there were no curtains to the windows. Preceding the room was a small hall, in which the attendant slept. The window was made secure by a strong iron-wire trellis. After his death access to this room was forbidden by his family, which makes one think of something Flaubert said about what he had amused himself with in Switzerland.

His condition was kept as much as possible from his mother, who in any case could not have faced the long journey to come and see him. His father, who was living on the Riviera (at St. Maxime's, Var), had been unaware of how close was the catastrophe, as the day after Guy's death he was seen outside his villa, reading

FACSIMILE OF GUY'S CERTIFICATE OF BAPTISM.



## OF GUY DE MAUPASSANT

the paper which he had been to fetch from the station. Suddenly he gave a great cry and proclaimed the sad news. It was stated by Dr Balestre, contrary to current report, that he did not come to Paris for the funeral. •

During his last days Maupassant had been violent and had been confined to his room, without being allowed out for his daily two hours of exercise in the park or préau. On the morning of July 7th, 1893, he seemed very tired and did not rise. It is said that he was heard to mutter : “ *Des ténèbres. Des ténèbres.*”

And then. . . .

And then, as his attendant said, “ he went out like a lamp that has no more oil.” Death took him,

*“ La mort que nous aimons,  
Que nous eûmes toujours  
Pour but de ce chemin  
Où prospèrent la ronce et l'ortie. . . .”*

as wrote another poet on whom Fate laid a hand no less heavy than upon Guy de Maupassant.

FINIS



## INDEX

### A

- "Academy, Maupassant and, 276.  
*"A Cheval,"* cited, 139.  
 Adam, M<sup>de</sup>me. Juliette (liberal female Maecenas), 215-217, 227, 294, 352-4.  
 —on Maupassant, 352-355.  
 Aeschylus, Maupassant compared to, 35.  
 Agen, Boyer d', 315.  
 Alexis, Paul, 160, 181.  
 Alis, Harry, Editor, 215.  
 Allieu, Printer, 215.  
 Almanach Lorrain de Pont-à-Mousson, The, 41, 167.  
 Alphonsine, "Cinquante Ans de Servitude," 63.  
*Ame Etrangère, L'* 261.  
*Angélus, L'* 128, 261.  
 Annunzio, Gabriele d', 331.  
 Antibes, Cap d', 113.  
 Arbre, M<sup>de</sup>me. de l', 130.  
 Arc, Joan of, Martyr and Saint, 17, 33, 99, 173.  
 —Maupassant on, 234.  
 Aréne, Paul, 246.  
*Assommoir, L'*, quoted, 17 (*note*), 37, 38.  
 Aurevilly, Barbey d', 173 (*note*).  
 Aubourg, Abbé, 73.  
 Augé et Borel, Publishers, 97.  
 Austria, Emperor of, 44.  
 Austen, Jane, 106 (*note*).  
*Aux Champs*, cited, 15.

### B

- "B.", Boule-de-Suif's True Love, 15.  
 Babanine, Dina, 173 (*note*).  
 Balestre, Dr, 279, 389.

- Balzac, Honoré de, 245.  
 Banville, Théodore de, 220.  
 "Baranow, Marie," 172.  
 Bardoux, Agénor, Minister, 210 *et seq.*  
 Bashkirtseff, Madame, 305.  
 Bashkirtseff, Marie, 173, 298 *et seq.*  
 —Maupassant, Letters to, 300, 302, 303.  
 Basin, Thomas, 33.  
 Bastien-Lepage, Jules, Painter, 173, 298, 309.  
 Baudry, Botanist, 175.  
 Beaumarchais, 165.  
 Beaurepaire, Antoinette de, 43.  
 Becker, G., 191.  
*"Bel Ami,"* cited, 102, 138-9, 236.  
 Bellangé, Portraitist, 48.  
 Bergerat, Emile, 181.  
 Bernard, sailor, 364.  
*"Bijoux, Les,"* cited, 199.  
 Birth-Certificate, Maupassant, of, 26.  
 Bismarck, Prince, 31.  
 "Black Sheep, The," a Spook, 62, 63.  
 Blanche, Dr, 80, 341, 370, 384-6.  
 Blaythwaitism, 259.  
 Blengues, Harnois de, 80.  
 Boileau, 247.  
 Bonaparte, Gen., 172.  
 Bonaparte, Jerome, Roi pour Rire, 187, 204.  
 Boswell, James, 331 (*note*).  
 Bouilhet, Louis (Poet?), 93-97.  
 Boule-de-Suif, 230, 231.  
 —Real story of, 1-22.  
 —Maupassant, meetings of, with, at Tôtes, 8; at Rouen (?), 10.  
 Bourbon-Penthièvre, Duc de, 367 (*note*).

## INDEX

Bourget, Paul, 263, 324, 330, 348.  
 —Maupassant, and, compared,  
   267-8.  
 "Bovary, Madame," 16.  
 Bradford, John, 267.  
 "Brady, Agénor," Poetaster, 217.  
 Brantôme, 230.  
 Bridoux, H., 10.  
 Brillat-Savarin, King of Opti-  
   mists, 269.  
 Brunetière, Critic, 263, 267-8, 350.  
 Bunyan, 73.  
 Burg's, von, Proclamation, 11-12.  
 Byron, Lord (and Wordsworth),  
   46, 253.

### C

Caine, Sir Hall, 314.  
 Carrel, Armand, 97.  
 Cassagnac, Paul de, 306-7.  
 Castiglione, Countess de, 291.  
 Cahen, Albert (Courtisan de la  
   dernière heure), 388.  
 Cazalis, Dr, 384-5.  
 Céard, Henri, 181, 233, 270.  
 Cézanne, 184.  
 Chardon, Mme., 267 (*note*).  
 Charmes, Victor, Literary Bureau-  
   crat, 211-12, 232-3.  
 Charles, Fisher lad, 75.  
 Charpentier, George, Publisher,  
   158, 181, 240, 281, 312.  
 Charrettes, Rue des, 44-46.  
 Chuzzlewit, Martin, 132.  
 "*Clair de Lune*," cited, 101.  
 Claretie, George, 386.  
 Clauzet, Gab., 122.  
 Cleland, John, 202 (*note*).  
 Coat-of-Arms, The Maupassant,  
   46.  
 Combertin, Madame de, 130.  
 Conard, Louis, 372.  
 Coppée, Fr., Poet, 184, 255, 263.  
 Cord'homme, an Uncle, 10, 48,  
   224.  
 Cord'homme, Mme., an Aunt, 49.

Cordier, Senator, 217.  
 Cornhill Magazine, The, 106 (*n*).  
 —Maupassant, Article on, in, 343.  
 Corneille, Pierre, 97.  
 Courteline, George, 199 *et seq.*,  
   213.  
 Crispi, Signor, 320-1.

### D

Dalloz, 93.  
 Damiens, Maupeou, and, 34.  
 Dante, 18.  
 Darenberg, Dr, 378, 380.  
 Daudet, Alphonse, 79, 158, 181.  
 —Maupassant, on, 179.  
 Daudet, Léon, 208, 235, 282.  
 —Maupassant, Portrait of, 281-2.  
 Deshayes, Emile,  
 —Maupassant, Letter from, to,  
   259-60.  
 Deslandes, Raymond, 193.  
 "*Des Vers*," 215.  
 "*Deux Amis*," cited, 127.  
 Dickens, Charles, 245.  
 Didon, Father, 254.  
 Dierx, Léon, 213.  
 Dodd, Dr (Tyburnian), 70.  
 Dorchain, A., 374, 377.  
 D'Osmoy, 217.  
 Doumergue, Gaston H. E., 362.  
 Dubosc, G. (Scholar, Writer,  
   Legion of Honour), 32, 34, 71,  
   78, 91, 98.  
 Duelling, Maupassant and, 316-19.  
 Dumas, Alexander, 198.  
 Dumas, Alex., fils, 262.  
 Duplay, Dr., 55.  
 Duplessis, Charles, 131.  
 Dying Woman, Maupassant's  
   Goodness, on, 21-22.  
 Eggers, John, 286.  
 Eletôt, 6.  
 "*En Wagon*," cited, 61.

# INDEX

Esch, Writer and Professor, 108  
*et seq.*, 308.  
 Eugénie, Empr., 172.  
 Eye, Maupassant on Training of,  
 9.

## F

Fabre, J. H., Naturalist, 267.  
 Faguet, Emile, Critic, 200, 350.  
 Faure, M., 130.  
 Fauvel, Dr., 71.  
 "Femme Fatale La," Story of, 376  
*et seq.*  
 Feuillade, Royannez, Duc de,  
 Crusader, 351.  
 "Feuille à l'Envers La," a boat,  
 163.  
 Feutry, Madame (née Dunet),  
 23-4.  
 "Fils Un," cited, 275.  
 Flaubert, Gustave, 10, 16, 49, 69,  
 70, 71, 88, 91, 93, 96, 136, 142,  
 145, 147-8, 155-7, 173, 182-3,  
 191-2, 227, 261, 353, 388.  
 —Letters from, to—  
   Maupassant, Guy de, 145, 149,  
   153, 156, 174-5-6, 192, 209-  
   13, 216, 219, 220, 227.  
   Maupassant, Laure de, 143,  
   144, 214.  
   Zola, Emile, 147, 148, 202.  
 —Pierre Corneille, on, 351.  
 Fontaine, Léon, 155, 167.  
 Fortin, Dr, 203.  
 Fouquet, Financier, 367 (*note*).  
 Fouquier, Henri, 292, 388.  
 Fourichon, Admiral, 132.  
 Fournier, Dr, 204, 355.  
 France, Anatole, 323.  
 Freud, Siegmund, 357 (*note*).  
 François, Literary Valet-Cook, 9,  
 20, 22, 45, 113, 115, *et passim*.  
 François, Madame (of Dieppe),  
 playmate, 30, 51, 72.  
 Friedrich William, Prince, 11.

## G

"Garçon, Un Bock," cited, 57.  
 Garvice, Charles, 349.  
 Gaulois, *Le*, 235.  
 Gautier, Théo., 7.  
 Genettes, Mme. Flaubert, Letter  
 from, to, 228.  
 Gervex, Henri, 79, 318, 320, 321.  
 "Gil Blas," Newspaper, 41.  
 Gladstone, W. E., 305.  
 Glatz, Dr, 206.  
 Goethe, 357.  
 Goncourt, Edmond de, 29, 30, 41,  
 135, 158, 181, 191, 203, 270,  
 309, 361, 363-5-6, 387.  
 Gonne, Maude, Lovely Irish  
 Revolutionary, 98.  
 Good Heart, Boule-de-Suif's, 13  
*et seq.*  
 Gounod, 376.  
 Gray, Thomas, Poet, 95.  
 Grévy, Jules, a President, 216-7.  
 Grout, Dr, 367.  
 Grubby, Dr, Specialist on "Grub,"  
 353.  
 "Guillemot, Passant," 40.  
 Guiton, Dr, 36, 63.  
 Gull Ranger, 17.  
 Gustacci, Léon, 251.

## H

Halévy, Ludovic, 276.  
 Hamilton, Duke of, 305-6, 310.  
 Harrans, Carolus, Editor, 49.  
 Havard, Victor, Publisher, 121,  
 241, 263, 286, 327, 348.  
 —Letters from, Maupassant to,  
 241-2, 312, 328, 329.  
 Hecht, Dr, Benefactor, 207.  
 Heine, Heinrich, 155.  
 Hell, The Most Terrible, 18.  
 Hennique, 181.  
 Henry, O., 244.  
 Heredia, J. M. de, 20, 181, 285.  
 "Histoire du Vieux Temps," 192.



# INDEX

Hitte, Police-Commissary, 5, 19.  
Homer, 249.  
Hugo, Fr. Vict., 73.  
Hugo, Victor, 295, 328.  
Huret, Jules, 369 (*note*).  
Hunter, Dr John, 204.  
Huysmans, 181.

## I

Isle-Adam, Villiers de l', 183.

## J

Jacob, Maître, Fighting Avoué,  
242-3, 265, 332, 360.  
Johnston, Mary, 252.  
"Joueur, Le," cited, 45.  
*Journal de Rouen, Le*, 1.  
Journalism in France,

## K

Kerville, Gadeau de, Letter to re  
Guy's Birthplace, 28.  
Kistemaeckers, 284.  
Kock, Paul de, 270.  
Koning, Victor, 194.

## L

Lacaze-Duthiers, G. de, 335, 336.  
Lacenaire, Murderer, 344.  
Lacour, 292.  
"La Folle," cited, 127.  
Lafontaine, 19, 350.  
Lagier, Suzanne, Actress, 55, 191.  
Lamballe, Princess de, 367.  
Languages, Maupassant and, 73.  
Landolt, Oculist, 203, 207.  
Langlet, M., Schoolmaster and  
Secretary, 25.  
Lapierre, Charles, 160, 237.  
Laurent-Pichat, Poetical Senator,  
Published "Madame Bovary,"  
217.  
"Latin, La Question du," 74.  
Lauzun, Armand-Louis de, 367  
(*note*).

Lauzun, Duc de, 367 (*note*).  
Leblan, Portraitist, 47.  
Lebreton, André, Chatelain at  
Miromesnil, 28 *et passim*.  
Lecointe, Mayor, 25.  
Lecouvreur, A., 2.  
Lecuyer, Henri, Maupassant's  
double, 53 *et seq.*  
Legay, Adr., 1-22, 99.  
Lelieux, Apollone, Testator, 163.  
Leloir, 191.  
Lemaître, Jules, Acad., 221, 263,  
270.  
—Maupassant, on, 221-222.  
Léon, Madame Bovary's latest, 16.  
Le Poittevin, Louis, 290.  
Le Rat, Etcher, 220.  
Leroux, Senator, Author, late, 32,  
33, 56-7, 86, 255.  
Leroy-Petit, Institution, 74.  
Le Tellier, a Chancellor, 246.  
Leteurte, 366.  
Loti, Pierre, 112, 268.  
Louis, XIV, 367 (*note*).  
Louis XV, 33, 269.  
Louis XVI, 33.  
Louis, XVIII, 47.  
"Loup, Le," cited, 44.  
Lowe, Sir Hudson, Gaoler, 172.  
Lumbroso, Baron, Maupassantist,  
135, 191, 205-6, 321.  
Luys, Dr, 387.  
Lycée de Rouen, Le, Book on, 97.

## M

Mackinnon, Mr Justice, 106 (*note*).  
"Mademoiselle Fifi," quoted, 127.  
"Main Ecorchée, La," quoted, 41.  
"Maison Tellier, La," Story of,  
237.  
—Zola on, 248.  
"Maison Turque, La," Production  
of, 191.  
Maizeroy, René, 280, 356, 357.  
Malcolm, Scottish Philanderer, 73.

## INDEX

- Mallarmé, Stéphane, 183.  
 Margherita, Savoia di, 322.  
 Marie, Aug. Dr, 387.  
 Marquises, Decadence of Title, 45.  
 —Napoleon and, 45.  
 Martel, Tancred, 233.  
 —Portrait of Maupassant by, 245-246.  
 Mathilde, Princess, Frugal Female Maecenas, 187, 192, 203, 227, 367.  
 Mattioli, Count ("Iron Mask"), 367 (*note*).  
 "Maufrigneuse," 41.  
 "Maupassant, En Relisant," 108 *et seq.*  
 Maupassant Ancestry, 42, 44, 47.  
 Maupassant, Gustave de, 24, 39, 67, 68, 69, 121, 130, 131, 135 *et passim*, 388, 389.  
 —Pourtrayed by son, 52 *et seq.*  
 Maupassant, Guy de—  
 —Academy and, 276.  
 —Actor, as, 82 *et seq.*  
 —Africa, Voyage to, 272 *et seq.*  
 —Alcohol, and, 322, 353.  
 —"Angélus, L'," on, 374-5.  
 —Art, His, on, 265.  
 —Athleticism of, 161.  
 —Auvergne, in, 323-24.  
 —Baptism of, 62.  
 —Boating, Love for, 159 *et seq.*  
 —Brain, Total transformation of his, 166.  
 —Caricatures himself, 198.  
 —Cats, and, 113 *et seq.*  
 —Character, Contradictions in his, 118.  
 —Childhood, Happy at Etretat, 71.  
 —Chilliness, His, 355.  
 —Coat-of-Arms, the, 45.  
 —Compared to—  
   —Bourget, 267-8.  
   —Zola, Flaubert, Paul de Kock, 270.  
 —Conduct in Asylum, His, 2.  
 Maupassant, Guy de—*Continued*—  
 —Confirmation of, 78.  
 —Correspondent, Courtesy, His, as a, 50.  
 —Corsica, Visits, 251.  
 —Country house, Builds a, 288.  
 —Cruelty to Animals, His, 107 *et seq.*, 375.  
 —Daudet, Alphonse, on, 179.  
 —Daudet, Léon, on, 281-2.  
 —Decorations, on, 92 *et passim*.  
 —Dog, Fight with, 354.  
 —Didon, Father, and, 254.  
 —Drugs, and, 369.  
 —Duelling, and, 316-319.  
 —Education, of Flaubert, by, 145 *et seq.*, 148-150.  
 —Expulsion of, 87.  
 —Eyes, on, 207.  
 —Eyes, his, Daudet on, 179.  
 —Flaubert, and, Last services to, 228, 229.  
 —Flaubert Memorial, Attendance at Inauguration of, 365-6-8.  
 —Flaubert, Article on, 178.  
 —Flaubert, Devilling for, 174-5.  
 —Flaubert, Reputed relationship with, His, 30.  
 —Forlorn wanderings, His, 374.  
 —Gambling, Dislike of, 241.  
 —Gaulois, *Le*, Hoaxes, 222-4.  
 —Goodness of heart, His, 20-22.  
 —Government Clerks, on, 137 *et seq.*  
 —Havard, and, 241 *et seq.*  
 —Hervé's Death, on, 342-3.  
 —Holidays, Etretat, at, 105 *et seq.*  
 —Instruction, Public, Ministry of, at, 177, 210.  
 —Italy, Journey to, 319.  
 —Journalist, as, 150, 179, 180, 214, 236, 253, 261, 351, 376.  
 —Journey, Paris, to, Last, 384.  
 —Languages, and, 73.  
 —Largesse, and, 347.  
 —Legal Studies, and, 122, 131, 135.

## INDEX

- Maupassant, Guy de—Continued—**  
 —Lemaitre, and, 221.  
 —Litigiousness, His, 120 *et passim*.  
 —Mallarmé, and, 183-4.  
 —Ministry of Marine, at, 132, 133, 138, 139, 140, 159, 197.  
 —Militarism, on, 123 *et seq.*  
 —Mystery, Birthplace, his, of, 24 *et seq.*  
 —Money, and, 240, 313-315, 349.  
 —Mother, Final meeting with his, 381.  
 —Names, on Inventing, 245.  
 —Napoleon, and, 257.  
 —Nihilist, as a, 161.  
 —Norman, his right to style of, 49, 50.  
 —*Nouvelle Revue, La*, and, 215.  
 —Observation, Practice of, on, 105.  
 —*Ondoiment* of, 61, 62.  
 —Pity, Dawning of, in, 118.  
 —Playwright, as, 191.  
 —Plots, how obtained, his, Practical Jokes, and, 343-47.  
 —Precocity of, 60.  
 —Priests, and, 100 *et seq.*  
 —Prosecution of, 216, 220.  
 —Prudence, his, 232, 235, 236.  
 —Purity, Language, his, of, 146.  
 —Queen of Italy, and, 322.  
 —Religion, and, 254-256.  
 —Renan, Ernest, and, 185.  
 —"Salonnard," as, 214, 372.  
 —Shakespeare, and, 72.  
 —Signatures, 55.  
 —Slips, his rare, 140.  
 —Smoker, as, 206.  
 —Society, and, 371-72.  
 —Statue to, Rouen, in, 74.  
 —Student days, Rouen, in, 90 *et seq.*  
 —Suicide, Attempt at, 382.  
 —Swinburne, and, 293 *et seq.*  
 —Taine, and, 185-88.  
 —Telegram, Mother, to his, 377.
- Maupassant, Guy de—Continued—**  
 —Theatres, and, 324.  
 —Tourguéneff, and, 181, *et seq.*  
 —Visits England, 323, 324.  
 —Walking-Tour, Brittany, in, 274-5.  
 —Walking-Tours, on, 274.  
 —Women, on, 310.  
 —Works, Chronological List, his, of, 260, 261.  
 —Work, Hours of, his, 321.  
 —Work, Power of, his, 360.  
 —Writing, on, 370.  
 —Yvetôt, Schooldays, at, his, 81 *et seq.*
- Maupassant, Hervé de, 36, 121, 158, 214, 290, 340-1, 348.  
 Maupassant, Jules de, 47, 121, 124 *et passim*.  
 —Pourtrayed by Grandson, 48.  
 Maupassant, Laure de, 23, 24, 66, 67, 70, 76, 78, 80, 84, 87, 88, 91, 92, 115, 121, 137, 142, 150, 158, 305, 339, 379.  
 —Corsica Stay in, 251.  
 —Devotion to Sons, 55 *et seq.*  
 —Flaubert, Letters to, 88, 142.  
 —Moments, Last with Guy, 382.  
 Maupassant, Guy de, Letters to, Bashkirtseff, Marie, 304, *et passim*.  
 —Deshays, 259.  
 —Friends, Despairing, 372, 373, 378, 379, 380.  
 —Koning, Victor, 194.  
 —Le Poittevin, L., 163.  
 —Marine, Minister of, 123, 130.  
 —Peladan, Josephin, 287.  
 —Pinchon, Robert, 193, 356.  
 —Scholl, Aurelien, 218.  
 —Taine, H., 187, 188.  
 —Letters to, from, Bashkirtseff, Marie, 300, 302, 303, 304.  
 —Flaubert, 145, 149, 153, 156, 174-5-6, 192, 209-213, 216, 219, 220, 227.

# INDEX

- Maupeou, Chancellor, 33.  
 —Damien, and, 34.  
 Maynial, Ed., biographer of Maupassant, 64, 68, 72, 77, 91, 122-3, 133, 160, 181, 224, 341.  
 —Maupassant's Education by Flaubert, on, 151-2.  
 Ménard, 149.  
 Mendés, Catulle, 178, 181-2, 280.  
 Mérimée, Prosper, 223.  
 "Messieurs Les Ronds-de-Cuir," cited, 200.  
 Meuriot, Dr, 341, 369, 385.  
 Michelet, 173.  
 Millevoye, Jules, 98.  
 Mirbeau, Octave, 361-2.  
 Miromesnil, Château de, 23, 24.  
 Miromesnil, Hue de, Great Chancellor, 24 *et seq.*  
 Moiron, Colonel, 171.  
 Montenevoso, Prince of, 331.  
 Montepin, Xavier de, 69.  
 Montespan, Mme. de, 367 (*note*).  
 Mont-Oriol, Publisher on, 328.  
 Monzie, H. E. A. de, Minister of Public Works, 25, 123, 133, 134, 135, 139, 177, 198, 200, 201, 213.  
 Motte, a chemist, 1.  
 "Musotte," 194-5.  
 Musset, Alfred de, 202, 357.  
 Murray, Miss, Mauritius Creole, a, 47, 64.
- N
- Napoleon, 125, 255, 298, 308.  
 —Marquises, and, 45.  
 —Maupassant, and, 257.  
 —Maupassant on, 234.  
 Napoleon III, 6, 124, 172.  
 Neveux, Pol, 264, 281, 368.  
 Neville, Lady Dorothy, 323.  
 Normand, Jacques, 194-5.  
 Normandy, George, 20, 24-25.  
 "Nos Anglais," Ref. to Bouilhet, in, 96.
- Nouvelle Revue, La, Maupassant, and, 215.  
 Nouy, Mme. Lecomte de, 330, 337-339, 368.  
 Ollendorff, Publisher, 220, 242, 244, 348, 384-5.  
 O'Monroy, Richard, 280.  
 Orbigny, Mme. de, 63, 65.  
 Ouled-Nail Tribe, the, 273.  
 Oxford, Visit to, Maupassant's, 324.
- Pailleron, Ed., 93.  
 "Pair du Ménage, La," 195.  
 "Papa de Simon, Le," cited, 38.  
 Pardieu, Count de, 131.  
 Paris, Monsieur de, 34.  
 Pascal, 58, 221.  
 Pasteur, Louis, Benefactor, 207.  
 Peladan, Josephin, 288.  
 —Letter from Maupassant to, 287.  
 "Père Amable, Le," quoted, 102.  
 Perier, Casimir, 97.  
 Petit Rouennais, Le, newspaper, quoted, 6, 17.  
 "Petite Roque, Le," cited, 102.  
 Philippe Egalité, 367 (*note*).  
 "Pierre et Jean," Preface to, 93.  
 "Pierrot," quoted, 109 *et seq.*  
 Pinch, Thomas, 132, 345.  
 Pinchon, Robert, 160, 163, 167, 191.  
 "Piroli," a cat, 170.  
 Piroli, Count, 170.  
 Pius IX, 374.  
 Plage Normande, La, magazine, a, 50.  
 Pluchart, Mademoiselle, 47.  
 Poittevin, Le, Alfred, 31.  
 Poittevin, P. Le, Black Sheep, and, 62-3.  
 Porto Riche, G. de, 329, 358.

# INDEX

Pouchet, Dr, 203, 227.  
 Potocka, Countess, 293.  
 Prévost, Abbé, 9.  
 Primoli, Count Joseph, 319, 321, 384, 386.  
 "Prunier, Joseph," 41.  
 Prussians, Rouen, in, 11 *et seq.*  
 Public Morality, Maupassant, and, 280.

## R

Racine, 247.  
 Raymond, sailor, 364, 380, 383.  
 Reibrach, Jean, 280.  
 Renan, Ernest, exegete, 196.  
 —Maupassant, and, 185.  
 —Naturalists, on, 185.  
 Renaud, J. Joseph, champion fencer, 356.  
 Renette, Gastine, duellists' outfitter, 317.  
 Renouard, painter, 48.  
*Revue des Deux Mondes, La*, 93 *et passim*.  
 Richemont, Comte de, 275.  
*"Roche aux Guillemots, La,"* quoted, 107.  
 Rocher, Dr, 1.  
 Rochester, Lord, 146.  
 Rod, Edouard, 184.  
 Roget, Louisa, 42.  
 Roget, Pierre, "respectable man, a," 42.  
*"Rondeli, Soeurs, Les,"* 75.  
 Roosevelt, Blanche, 323, 324.  
*"Rose,"* plagiarized in *World*, 84.  
 Rossetti, D. G., 6.  
 Rothschild, Baron de, 343.  
 Rouen, Refs. to, 4, 5, 8, 11, 18 *et passim*.  
 —Bishop of, 78.  
 —Draped in Black, 11.  
 —English in, 12.  
 Roujon, Henri, 160, 183, 211.  
 Rousseau, J. J., 106.

## S

Sabattier, bureaucrat, 202.  
 Saquespée, L.-A. de, 43.  
 Sade, Marquis de, 384.  
 Saisset, Admiral, 130-132.  
 Salle, Col. de la, 141.  
 Sand, George, 202.  
 San Pola, Marquis de, 296.  
 Sanson, bourreau, 367 (*note*).  
 Saunier, Mme. Catherine, midwife, 23-4.  
 Scholl, Aurelien, 217-8.  
 Schopenhauer, 269.  
 Sedley, Sir Charles, 146.  
 Sevigné, Madame de, 47.  
 Shakespeare, 51, 72, 249.  
 —Hand of, 171.  
 —Maupassant and, 72.  
 Shelley, P. B., 357.  
*"Sigma," Cornhill*, in, 343-5, 369.  
 Silvestre, Arm., 215 (*note*).  
 Sin, Staleness of, 17.  
 Sollier, Dr Paul, 357.  
 Son, Adopted, Boule-de-Suif's, 14.  
*"Souvenir,"* cited, 140.  
 Spalikowski, Ed., distinguished writer on Normandy, 80-1.  
 Sweeny Todd, 345.  
 Swinburne, A. C., 6, 293 *et seq.*  
*"Sur les Chats,"* cited, 113 *et seq.*  
*"Sur l'Eau,"* cited, 137.

## T

Taine, Hippolyte, 35, 185.  
 —Madame, 187.  
 —Maupassant and, 185-188.  
 Talmeyr, Maurice, 293, 314, 316.  
*"Testament, Le,"* cited, 332.  
 Tancret, 247.  
 Thackeray, W. M., 28.  
 Theuriet, André, 305.  
 Thibaudet, Albert, 145.  
 Thin Women, Gautier on, 7.  
 Thurin, Victoire Marie, 62.  
 Torture, Self, unabolishable, 25.

- Torture, 118-119.
- Toussaint, Louis, 118 et seq., 119.
- Maupassant, Letter to, 118-119.
- 239.
- Tourville-sur-Arques, 21.
- Trease, publisher, 184.
- "Trois Normands," by Dubost, George, 42.
- U
- Urbain, Pope.
- V
- Vacquerie, A., 217.
- Vallée, Bourlet de la, Flaubert on, 70.
- Valmont, M. de, 46.
- "Valmont, Guy de," 41.
- Valmont, Renée de, Maupassant as, 83-84.
- Vaux, Baron de, 318-9.
- Van Dyck, 325.
- Velasquez, 320.
- "Verguies, Lea," "dear House, the," 66 et seq.
- Victor Emmanuel, King, 299.
- W
- Waddington, 37.
- Wardancher, Cl. de Maupassant, de, *Officiers* in Corsica, 44.
- Wassermann, 207, 337.
- Wilde, Oscar, 323.
- Wilson, a son-in-law, 216-7.
- Wolff, Albert, 225, 227, 229, 247, 263.
- Wordsworth, 70.
- Byron and, 46.
- World, The, 84.
- Wurtemberg, Duke of, 204 (note).
- Y
- Yates, Edmund, 84.
- Z
- Zola, Emile, 87, 69, 146, 147-8, 157-8, 178 (note), 181, 183, 191, 211, 217, 222 et seq., 228, 261, 263, 274, 309, 337, 350, 351, 366.
- "Boule-de-Suif," on, 248-9.
- Maupassant, on, 189.









